

300 Atlanta puts party spin on bowling

By DAVID GRAVES

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

There's a thunderous "Yeaaaaah!" on a recent Friday night at 300 Atlanta bowling lanes as DJ Anthony suddenly switches tracks to the popular "Cupid Shuffle." Then, almost in one fell swoop, many folks put down their bowling balls, martini glasses and nibbles for a spirited rendezvous in the main aisle.

To the right, to the right, to the right, to right ... Now walk it by yourself, now walk it by yourself.



DAVID GRAVES/Staff

Ron Blair goes for a strike at 300 Atlanta.

Like clockwork, everyone energetically falls into the latest line dance and whoop it up.

That's because 300 Atlanta, the former Chamblee Lanes that opened two years ago and one of six in the country, isn't your average bowling alley. At this AMF-owned high-tech hot spot, there's no taking score on paper with tiny, dull No. 2 pencils under fluorescent lights. There's no concession stands with sweaty hot dogs rolling under heat lamps, and jukeboxes in the corner playing three songs for \$1? Forget it.

Think bowling for the modern age.

"This is a good median between MySpace and Face Book," says 300 Atlanta promotions assistant J. Chris Boone, referring to the popular networking Web sites where people socialize and connect. "People come here to meet because they know it's a safe, fun environment in a hip nightlife atmosphere."

As hip-hop tunes blare, from Notorious B.I.G.'s "Hypnotize" to R. Kelly's "Step in the Name of Love," to Kanye West's "Stronger," the party vibe is infectious, with videos playing on four huge flat screens above 40 lanes that shoot cosmic lighting. While many folks actually bowl, far more grab a seat at tables on weekends starting around 7 p.m. to sip cocktails like the popular Bob Marley rum drink, shoot pool, mingle and nosh on food from the full-service restaurant.

"We're out just having a blast," says Rodney Reese of Atlanta. "I like the fact this isn't your typical bowling alley. You get a little of everything, and I like the combo of bowling, cocktails and good music all in one spot."

Experiencing new and exciting scenes on the nightlife landscape has been a serious topic within the past few years as groups like Play Date Atlanta began hosting a monthly board-game extravaganza at Crown Plaza Ravinia at Perimeter Mall in 2005. There's also the unique Paint-By-Numbers social held at local art galleries, where guests paint murals while they sip drinks and mingle.

"People always want something different," says 300 Atlanta executive chef Jason Clark Ellis. "Here, we keep trying to stay innovative and not just give a bowling experience. Where else can you go and get all of this under one roof? We can party and dance all night Saturday, and by Sunday afternoon, be up and ready for kids' birthday parties."

Ellis says the alley, which already custom-fits each bowler for a ball and has attendants find the right one, is preparing to undergo a \$300,000 renovation project. It includes replacing the four flat screens over the lanes with an elongated Jumbotron-like mega-screen and making way in the billiards area for a tapas lounge.

The AMF-operated venue also plans to create an exclusive VIP area in the buffet room for the likes of Jermaine Dupri, Ludacris and T.I., who have been known to drop by. And four lanes will become VIP, too, for celebrity types.

"We've built a good relationship with the music industry," Ellis says and notes that even though stars don't have a problem mixing in with the public, sometimes they want a little privacy and this renovation addresses that.

So whether the public will have as much access to stars like Young Jeezy, who recently celebrated his birthday there, after the redo remains to be seen, but Decatur resident Mike Jones feels like a star himself this party night, standing out in the crowd in yellow slacks and shirt and white and blue vest.

"If you don't come out dress good, nobody will take you seriously," he says, admitting he's by far the best dressed man among the guys in jeans and polo shirts. "When I come to 300 Atlanta I feel like a superstar, shorty."

Bowling hot spots

300 Atlanta joins at least three other area bowling alleys that has revolutionized the game. Here's a peek:

300 Atlanta

Perfectly suitable as a daytime hangout for families and kids' parties. At night Friday and Saturday beginning around 7 p.m. nightlife vibe begins with DJ music kicking in around 9 p.m. 21 and older at nights, ID required. Dress is mostly casual, but some come dressed to impress. 2175 Savoy Drive, Atlanta. 770-451-8605, www.300atlanta.com.

Ten Pin Alley

Part of the Dolce Group at Atlantic Station, this is ultra chic and upscale. Marshall Crane, manager, says "There's a DJ and dance floor, and bowling is an accessory." Open since February, a mixed crowd of young professionals frequent the spot. Artists you're likely to hear as laser beams shoot and a huge chandelier pours from the ceiling include Madonna, Prince, Journey, Bon Jovi and Britney Spears. Venue is three levels with exquisite decor, rich woods, banquette seating and VIP area with three bowling lanes. Main alley has nine lanes. Appetizers served and dress is swanky and chic. 261 19th St. N.W., Suite 1200, Atlanta. 404-872-3364, www.shopatlanticstation.com.

Jillian's

Inside the shopping behemoth Discover Mills, Jillian's features 16 glowing lanes and features video monitors. It's motto is eat, drink, play and kids are more than welcome, but after dark they have to be accompanied by someone 25 or older. New weekend DJ is in the works, but currently satellite pumps R&B, pop and rock tracks as partyers bowl, shoot billiards, hang out in the Video Cafe or play arcade games. There's a full bar and full casual dining menu. Dress is casual. 5900 Sugarloaf Pkwy., Lawrenceville. 678-847-5400, www.jillians.com.