



## HARLEMLANES

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*PUBLISHED IN THE DAILY NEWS APRIL 1, 2006*

*Staff Writer*

If Gail Richards had any doubts that a bowling alley in Harlem was a smart investment, they vanished when a 92-year-old woman walked in crying. "She's an avid bowler but she can't really travel and she was so happy we're here. She said, 'You're going to see me a lot,'" Richards said. Richards and her niece, Sharon Joseph, have spent four years planning Manhattan's fourth bowling center - the first in the neighborhood since Lenox Lanes closed 30 years ago. And it looks like they might just strike it rich.

By the time Harlem Lanes opened for business on Adam Clayton Powell Blvd. and W. 126th St. yesterday, most prime-time slots in April had been booked. "I am a little surprised by the overwhelming response," said Richards, a former Board of Education psychologist. "The meter is beyond reading at this point."

Richards and Joseph, a business school graduate, had been brainstorming about entrepreneurial opportunities in the area for years. The neighborhood was attracting lots of professionals but lagged behind in services and entertainment. The two women knew nothing about bowling except that it was newly hip.

They began the arduous process of securing \$5 million in financing - with help from former President Bill Clinton's foundation - and finding a 25,000-square-foot space they could afford.

Their goal was to create a destination that would appeal to young families for birthday parties and adults looking for a way to spend a Friday night. "You want to get away from that Laverne and Shirley image," Richards said. "You want bowling to be something sexy and glamorous."

That explains the leather sofas, suede-covered party room and swank sports bar on the upper level of the 24-lane space. It also solves the mystery of a peculiar item for sale: red, white and blue bowling shoes with pointy toes and 3-inch heels.

"You can't use them on the lanes, but the waitresses will wear them," Richards explains.

Despite the chic trappings, the owners hope Harlem Lanes will also attract hard-core bowlers, the Fred-and-Barney crowd.

A few days before opening, a group of area firefighters came in to make reservations. They may play against a team from the local police precinct. Brian Steinwurtzel, of the Newmark real estate group, whose family is one of the alley's backers, watched with satisfaction.

"There's a half a million people who live 40 blocks in either direction, and if you want a nice upscale place to drink, eat and hang out, you're really struggling," he said. "We're not really in the bowling business, but we think this will work."

### **Harlem Lanes**

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