

Two Pins in the Lane

The 2012 Life Care Bowling League to benefit the Alzheimer's Association made its debut here in Cleveland, Tenn., Monday evening, and I have figured out why I was asked to roll the ceremonial first ball:

It sets the bar low enough that anyone can compete without being embarrassed. And that's a pretty good reason, right?

Well, I lived up to the low expectation. Here's my story:

I changed from my Florsheims to bowling shoes to keep from slipping in the approach to the lane, carefully chose the right ball, moved to the starting position, took a deep breath, and let it fly (which might be an exaggerated term). The ball started to the right, curved slowly toward center, and knocked over two pins on the left side.

The resulting cheer from the associates on the 10 Life Care teams, eager to get started, was a congratulatory acknowledgment that the ball stayed out of the gutter – which, in 2008, as they remember, is exactly where it landed.

And then the games began: a 10-team marathon over the next six weeks. Indeed, we have creative souls in our employ. Consider the names of these teams: Moneyball, Alley Oops, I Can't Believe It's Not Gutter, Gutter Humiliation, The Incredibowls, Spare Change, Turkey Hunters, Living on a Spare, Great Minds Think a Strike, and Rehab STRIKES Back.

My experience at the bowling alley – humbling as it was – reminds me of some important lessons:

- Practice may not make perfect, but it goes a long way toward avoiding embarrassment – since the last time I threw a bowling ball was in 2008. Life Care's mission is to be the premier provider of long-term care and the facility of choice in any community in which we operate. To achieve that distinction means we must train, train, train. If you wonder why we keep preaching that, then this is it.
- Team building is essential to success – in the bowling alley or in the nursing center. Tuesday morning, I heard repeatedly from our participants the enjoyment of the camaraderie, the strengthening of the ties of mutual respect and friendship among their co-workers/co-bowlers. When these qualities reign in our centers, our residents are the true beneficiaries.
- Giving to others brings a special inner joy. While our bowling league has brought some personal benefits, including fun and fellowship, it also has produced a deep satisfaction within, realizing that the cause for which they play – the fight against that devastating disease, Alzheimer's – is urgent. That is the real backdrop against which these devotees (at least for six weeks) of bowling gather and compete.

And if my conquest of two pins made any contribution to that effort, then it was worth it.

– Beecher Hunter