

## Game on



Scott Jacobson / sjacobson@postbulletin.com

Branden Strong has teamed up with James Aakre, owner of Protech Services, to open a video arcade space called Machine Shed in downtown Rochester. Strong is a custom game builder and restoration expert, rebuilding many machines that were popular decades ago. Machine Shed has 21 machines, some multi-cades, featuring as many as 645 different games. Branden also builds custom games. Machine Shed also has rentals available.

## Duo re-boot the classic video arcade in Rochester

BY JEFF KIGER  
jkiger@postbulletin.com

Sounds of explosions and crashes combined with wildly flashing lights to fill a dark, cavernous room crowded with laughing and talking people.

That's the arcade experience that graying children of the '80s and '90s remember when they think of video games. But to today's generation, sitting by themselves on living room couches while playing with others via the Internet, arcades are something they know only from old movies.

James Aakre and Branden Strong want to change that, as well as feed the nostalgia of their peers.

The two hobbyists have created their own Machine Shed arcade by rebuilding old games and putting together "multicade" cabinets, each containing hundreds of classic games like Donkey Kong, Pac-Man, Asteroids, Centipede, Joust and much more.

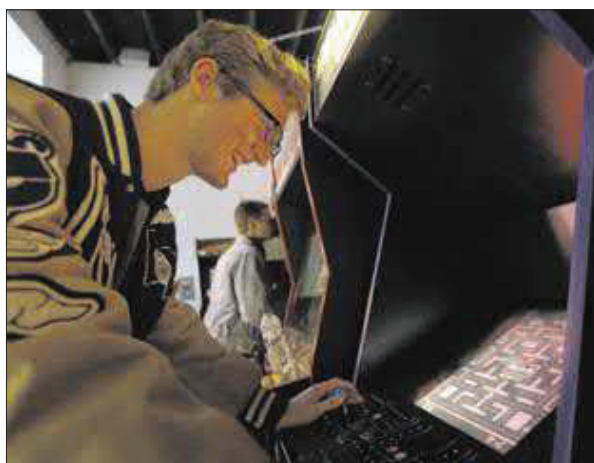
They now have 32 game cabinets running in a converted garage near downtown at 11 Second St.

NE. Eighties music videos are projected on the walls as players crowd around the revived arcade games.

No quarters are needed. A flat \$10 fee allows you to play as long as they are open.

The informal operation announces to its almost 600 fans when it is open on its Facebook group, The Machine Shed Game Collective. The call brings out players of all ages.

"It's all about the love of the games," said Strong, 39, of why



Andrew Link / alink@postbulletin.com

Erik Derby, 18, of Mantorville, plays Pac-Man on an Arcade Classics machine Sunday at Machine Shed.

he spends time tracking down old parts to bring old games back to life.

While old games are the focus, the Machine Shed is also about re-creating a group experience of the past.

Erik Derby, 18, of Mantorville, had never been in an arcade until he walked into the Machine Shed

on a recent Sunday afternoon.

"This place is pretty different and very awesome. It's kind of like of what the adults of our time used to do when they were kids," he said as he waited his turn to play Street Fighter. "We're trying it now, and we're loving it, too."

See **ARCADE**, page A2

## Mayor vetoes skyway permit revocation

UMR to assist in mediation effort

BY JAY FURST  
furst@postbulletin.com

Rochester Mayor Ardel Brede intervened Tuesday in the increasingly bitter dispute over a new private skyway over a downtown alley.

Brede vetoed the city council's revocation last week of the permit for the skyway, which links the 318 Commons building and the Big Brad's and former Paine Furniture buildings on South Broadway. All are owned by Rochester developers Hal Henderson and Grant Michaletz, and the University of Minnesota Rochester leases thousands of square feet of space in 318 Commons and the Paine building.

The council has been pressing Henderson and Michaletz to make a deal with the property owner next door for an easement for another skyway. On Nov. 21, it voted 4-3 to revoke the permit and gave Henderson and Michaletz until Jan. 4 to reach a deal or the \$375,000 skyway could be closed or demolished.

Council member Nick Campion said at that meeting, "I have no problem tearing it down" if the owners don't reach a deal.

The long-simmering dispute sharply escalated before the meeting last week, with council member Michael Wojcik blasting Henderson and calling him an "awful person" not to be trusted, and UMR Chancellor Stephen Lehmkuhle firing off a letter to the council that said the skyway is "key to UMR's success" and the threat of removing the skyway was "operationally and financially unacceptable."

As it turns out, Brede proposes to put UMR at the center of resolving the dispute.

In his veto message Tuesday, Brede said, "I understand the frustration in not being able to resolve the issue of certain easement rights regarding 318 Commons, adjacent property and the city of Rochester. (But) to revoke the skyway permit that provides the University of Minnesota Rochester access to the Paine Building from 318 Commons would be very detrimental to UMR and their future."

"To that end, UMR will commit to develop a plan for a mediated process between all parties in 30 days," he said by email. "An additional 120 days would be needed for UMR to seek a resolution between parties. I am confident that UMR will be engaged throughout the process, being mindful that the lender responsible for the financing of 318 Commons will need to approve the final agreement."

See **VETO**, page A2

# Local ne

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## Arcade

From page A1

Harrison Heppelman, 17, was first exposed to the Machine Shed games when he played some at Kasson's Festival in the Park. The Machine Shed rents out machines for special events, like the upcoming Rochester on Tap at Mayo Civic Center and company holiday parties.

"Next time we should bring our dads," Heppelman told Derby as they moved on to another game.

Aakre is pleased to see teenagers experiencing something he believes is missing from today's isolated, logged on culture.

"Society as a whole is so detached from this world. If you can bring them back down to a 4-bit or 8-bit game, they have to play against a friend who's right next to them. Or they have to make friends, because they have to play against somebody who is better than them," he said. "It's a win-win, I think."

Of course, it's not all about life lessons as players drive tanks on Battle Zone or try to survive the flames of Dragon's Lair II.

Strong remembers when he first restored a game at his house. While it was fun to play, it wasn't the same as playing at an arcade. He believes that the arcade amplifies the fun as gamers play shoulder to shoulder.

"There's something about people laughing and the game noise," agreed 42-year-old Jaime Odiet as he played Golden Tee Golf. "I think the laughter and noises make up about one-third of the experience at an arcade."

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## The Machine Shed – a low res solution to our high res world

🕒 NOVEMBER 30, 2016 BY 👤 BRYAN LUND



Fretting about not getting a Nintendo Classic Console?

Knock it off.

Rochester has something a million times better. We have a real arcade assembled from pieces of long dead

arcades from the 80s and 90s. We have the Machine Shed.

Give thanks to James Aakre and Branden Strong. The pair of modding enthusiasts (people who modify old video game hardware) met while trading

parts. Both come with serious backgrounds in gaming. Aakre, a former Street Fighter II national champion, got his start fixing arcade machines at Aladdin's Castle in the Galleria (now Shops at University), while Strong put in work at Funko Land and the original Machine Shed.



After Aakre organized successful Super Smash Bros and Street Fighter IV tournaments at this summer's Rochesterfest, the pair decided to follow the dreams of their younger selves and start an arcade. Why the demand for nostalgia, though?

"I think because we live in a high res world and everybody wants to be back to low res," said Aakre.

The whole enterprise, so far, has run on passion. They hand out cards in grocery lines, strike up conversations about video games. Their nights are filled with texts about joysticks, prices, screens, and games.



"The reality is, we're both broke, and we're still trying to get this afloat. We're like, 'If we could survive just one more month.' We know it'll be a hit. We spent all morning getting a Killer Instinct running. Not because we know it'll be profitable, just because it's awesome," said Aakre.

They offer an occasional open play option – \$10 for as much as you can play – or you can rent the arcade for up to 25 people for \$150 per hour. You can also rent their games, but those prices depend on a variety of factors. They sell custom multicades, too.



The place allows for a fully immersive nostalgia dip.

“There is no other place where you’re going to hear those blips and sounds like Defender. Or Robotron 2084. There’s nothing that’s going to sound like that again,” said Aakre. “Above and beyond is the smell. We have a game from ‘87 back over there and when you get close to the cabinet, and you smell, like, warm wood and dampness, that’s what you think of, is the 80s. 80s arcade. I’ll get next to it and I’ll start moving and I’ll get a waft of that smell and I’ll be like, “Oh, I’m home.” For me, it’s fantastic.”

“So many people play games with their headsets. They sit alone on their sofa or chair, but in the arcade, you actually are next to people, you might play games next to people you don’t know. You have to interact. Connect,” said Strong.

Thus far, mixed crowds of boomers, teenagers, and young children have interacted peacefully. People respect place-holder quarters, no one swears, and no one hangs off of the machines.

As far as keeping the arcade functioning into the future? The Kasson Boy Scouts are scheduled to earn their technology merit badge at Machine Shed, so the knowledge of this techno-wizardry will trickle further into the future.

To keep up with Machine Shed, follow them on Facebook, at [bit.ly/2gkXKTX](https://bit.ly/2gkXKTX). The arcade is located at 11 2nd St. NE.

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