

## **Wii Bowling is All the Rage at Front Porch Communities** ***Virtual bowlers compete in National Senior League***



**Carlsbad By The Sea resident B.J. Norton bowls a "virtual" strike while playing Wii Bowling.**

Dressed in shorts and purple shirt with the name Wii Warriors emblazoned across his chest, Jimmy Kennedy holds a small controller the size of a typical TV remote control in his hand and while facing a TV screen that depicts a bowling lane, Jimmy goes through the exact motions he would use if he was holding a 17-pound ball. The screen reads "strike" and Jimmy is pleased because in a few hours, his team, the Wii Warriors will be playing its Walnut Village Retirement Community rivals, the Wii Rangers, for campus bragging rights.

But the bragging rights go beyond just Walnut Village in Anaheim, Carlsbad By The Sea in Carlsbad and the other Front Porch communities that offer virtual bowling. Front Porch teams, with colorful names like Wii Rangers, Wii Warriors, Pins Gone, Strike Force, Pine Cone Bowlers, Great Ball of Fire and a host of others, take national competition seriously. Some Front Porch teams recently ranked as high as 16th in the National Senior League. The virtual 10-pin game is so popular with older adults, two

Front Porch teams from Walnut Village were recently spotlighted on KTLA 5 News and other news shows across the country.

"Each team plays to win but we all have fun," Jimmy said. "Tonight, the Warriors are competing against a team from Georgia and the Rangers are bowling against a team in Virginia. We not only play against each other, but we cheer each other on," Jimmy said.

The National Senior League posts scores weekly online and a national champion is crowned yearly.

It's a great way to exercise and it's a great way to make friends, socialize and build camaraderie. Each week, teams of four to eight residents per community compete in

head-to-head competition with teams from other communities all around the country. New teams are formed about once a quarter.

Many experts agree and studies have shown that even just a few sessions with the Wii has led to improved balance, coordination and strength, and could help prevent falls, a serious concern for many seniors. “It’s wonderful for residents’ overall wellbeing,” said Lola Ramos, health and wellness director at Walnut Village. “It gets people active and moving and into a positive social environment.”

“We have about 25 to 30 residents playing,” said James Bouchillon, a resident at England Oaks Adult Living Community in Alexandria, Louisiana, who with others bowls twice a week. “We have people of all abilities. We even have some who bowl sitting down and they do just as well as those who bowl standing up.”

“Everybody has a good time,” said Wii Bowling enthusiast Mary Jane Joseph after connecting on a strike while facing the virtual bowling lane in Carlsbad By The Sea’s recreation room. “We cheer when we do well and we moan when we mess up. Either way we always laugh.”



**Walnut Village residents cheer on their team mates at a recent Wii Bowling tournament.**

Carlsbad By The Sea’s Wii Bowling league has been a fixture at the community every Tuesday evening for more than two years. “It’s definitely one of our most popular activities,” said resident Frank Gift, one of the league’s organizers. “It’s taken off. We started with two teams and now we’re up to eight teams. The rest of the folks that fill up the room are the cheering section.”

Wii Bowling lets residents of all skill levels and abilities play. Players stand, or sometimes sit up in front of a large screen and manipulate the remote; it translates their arm motions onto the screen.

“We have one resident here with Parkinson’s Disease and limited mobility,” Lola said. “She comes here and bowls and bowls successfully, so the technology to help her do that is wonderful.”

For some older adults, part of the appeal of Wii Bowling is the nostalgia. It mimics the moves a bowler makes in an actual bowling alley, only players don't have to reserve a lane, don bowling shoes or pick up a heavy ball. They just have to be able to wave their hand.

Teams from Walnut Village, Wesley Palms in San Diego and Carlsbad By The Sea are currently competing in the National Senior League.

"Our objectives of this project are to expose our residents to the use of technology in a fun and entertaining way," said Davis Park, director of the Front Porch Center for Innovation and Wellbeing, which introduced residents to the sport. "We also see it as a means of expanding social interaction not only within our communities, but beyond the walls of the communities as well."

Wii Bowling is easy to learn and the motions and emotions of bowlers are quite similar to real bowling. Bowler and Carlsbad By The Sea resident B.J. Norton demonstrated the classic bowling approach and release recently during a game. She "lets go" of the ball by releasing the button she is pressing on the remote. On screen, the ball sails straight down the lane toward the pins. Her second roll cleans up a spare.

"I gotcha!" she exclaims as her cheering section leaps up with yelps and high fives all around.

"I think it keeps your mind alert," said Wii Warrior Ann Young, a Walnut Village resident. "You can't come down here and just do nothing. You bowl, yell and scream and let it all out."

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Front Porch is one of Southern California's largest nonprofit providers of senior living communities, affordable housing and skilled nursing centers. The group was formed with the merging of California Lutheran Homes *and Community Services*, Pacific Homes Corporation, Sunny View Lutheran Home and FACT Retirement Services, to create a progressive new senior service system that responds to the needs of individuals within a community setting. The resulting Burbank-based organization is made up of 10 full-service retirement communities in California, two adult living communities in Louisiana and Florida, and more than 20 affordable housing communities managed by our affiliate, CARING Housing Ministries.