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Right up their alley

By **Melissa Yerkov**
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It's been more than a half century, but Tony and Pat Florkowski still have it.

The former bowling aficionados are at it again, thanks to the Nintendo Wii — a new game console that allows participants to physically act out various sports, including bowling, with a remote-control paddle.

For the majority of their lives, the husband-and-wife team have shared a mutual love for strikes and spares. Now they are living in the Villages of Pine Valley — a 55-and-older active-adult community — and have a chance to strike up some fun with the neighborhood's new Wii bowling league, which offers various tournaments once a week.

"All the grandkids know how to do it, and now that we know how to do it, it's going to be fun," said Tony Florkowski, a lifetime Northeast resident. "I'm having a lot of fun with it. Plus it's something that you can do with a lot of people."

The newest creation from the same intelligent imaginations that brought us Super Mario Brothers and Zelda in the mid-1980s, the highly popular Wii has sold millions of consoles worldwide since its release last year.

The Wii console comes with a Wii sports game, allowing players to try out various bowling, boxing, golf and baseball activities and competitions. The sensitive wireless remote permits participants to move seamlessly, their movements replicated onscreen by a cute Wii character, called a Mii.

For most, it's a fun and entertaining new gadget.

However, for bowling buffs like the Florkowskis, it's an opportunity to relive their glory days at the bowling alley.

"I can't pick up a bowling ball anymore, because I broke my elbow, so it's so great to be able to bowl again," said Pat, who grew up in Mayfair and graduated from St. Hubert High School in 1955. "That's the best part of all this."

After a nasty fall two years ago, Pat — who calls herself a lifetime bowler — had

to give up the sport she'd come to love. However, with the arrival of Wii, she's on a roll once more.

"My elbow is OK now," she said, after tossing her second strike of the day last week at the Villages of Pine Valley Clubhouse. "It's not straight, but it's good."

The 70-year-old isn't the only whiz on the Wii. She has some stiff competition from husband Tony during the weekly competitions.

"We're trying to set up bowling teams and baseball teams that can actually play each other on the Wii," said the clubhouse manager, Virginia Simon. "Everyone really seems to like it."

The Villages of Pine Valley, located next to Pennypack Park on Pine Road, is a community where residents 55 and older can live in homes, apartments or condominiums. A clubhouse was recently added to the 3-year-old development, which hosts a plethora of activities, including the Nintendo Wii tournaments.

"We have things like card night, game night, we show Phillies games on the flat-screen TV," said Simon. "We also have an art program, craft programs in the fall, a library area with a fireplace, exercise classes, line dancing, a pool with water aerobics . . ."

And the list goes on. Many of the events held at the newly built clubhouse — which officially opened in February — are possible thanks to the community's residents.

For instance, Pine Valley resident John McGahey teaches a sketch and drawing class, and fellow resident Alex Yeh leads tai-chi classes at the clubhouse. But if you ask most of the community regulars, the most popular activity is definitely the Wii.

"I like that it gets everyone involved," said Tony. "A lot of people in our community can't do it anymore because the ball is too heavy or whatever the reason. Now they can. And we're all looking forward to playing more. It's great to get everybody together and have fun."

When Tony isn't bowling virtual strikes on the television screen, he's tossing the



JENNY SWIGODA / TIMES PHOTO

Longtime bowlers Tony and Pat Florkowski, who live at the Villages of Pine Valley, an active-adult community in Northeast Philadelphia, can continue their bowling career during the community's weekly Wii bowling tournaments.

real deal at the Harmonia Club, located at Aramingo Avenue and Orthodox Street.

"I've been with them for about thirty-five years," he said. "Now I'm a lifetime member down there, so it's a lot of fun."

In fact, Tony, 71, has been a force in the bowling alleys since his days at Abraham Lincoln High School, where he bowled for the Railsplitters before graduating in 1953.

"I've always loved to bowl. I also played softball, but then I had two Achilles-tendon operations," he said of the ankle surgery.

"After getting the Achilles-tendon operations, you have to play more controlled sports," Tony explained. "You can't have any sudden movements, so I

couldn't play softball or basketball or anything like that, but bowling and golf are OK."

And so golf and bowling are what he did.

About once a week, Tony heads out to the Five Palms Golf Course in Warminster, Pa., to take a round of swings. When that isn't possible, now he can practice by swinging a remote control.

"I really enjoyed the Wii golf game too, because I golf," he said with a smile. "The Wii is good because it's not strenuous, but it's still a lot of fun. And for the most part, anybody can do it — that's the best thing." ••

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