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## Alley, Cats

Bowling Gets a Makeover On East Fourth

By Douglas Trattner 



**Maui Pizza - Part of a well-rounded menu of American comfort foods.**

The lanes are still 60 feet long. There are still 10 Homer Simpson-shaped pins waiting at the far end of those lanes. The balls still are too heavy to manage comfortably with just two fingers and a thumb. And the shoe — well, the shoes haven't much changed, either. But apart from those bowling constants, little looks, sounds, tastes (or smells, thankfully) familiar at the Corner Alley.

### **4TH STREET BAR & GRILL**

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4th Street Bar & Grill  
402 Euclid Ave., Cleveland  
[4thstreetbarandgrill.com](http://4thstreetbarandgrill.com)

The Corner Alley promises to do for 10-pin what Hugh Hefner did for porn — elevate its status from a gauche and guilty pleasure to a legitimate and respectable pastime. Spread out over 25,000 square feet of prime real estate, the Corner Alley combines a restaurant, martini lounge and 16-lane bowling alley under one ultra-sleek big top.

Conceived by three former GameWorks execs, the Corner Alley marks the U.S. debut of their upscale bowling alley-martini lounge concept. While not wholly unique — Lucky Strike Lanes, for one, runs a dozen similarly themed spots in the country — the Corner Alley is certainly the most striking alley between Detroit and Philly. Trifecta Management Group, the operator, recently acquired Flannery's Pub and Cowboy Food and Drink, and plans to open Zocolo, a Mexican grill, on East Fourth Street this spring.

Urban hipster bowling is sweeping the nation and it was just a matter of time until it landed here in the "bowling belt." The appeal is obvious: It requires little or no skill. Participants rent equipment. Modern technology eliminates the need for stubby No. 2 pencils. And you can drink, which makes bowling fun even if you totally suck.

Trifecta did a phenomenal job; the high-energy space flows seamlessly from dining room to lounge to lanes. Oversize fixtures and deco furniture give the place a theatrical vibe not unlike an old-school Vegas casino. Each lane features its own lounge area, complete with sofas, tables and the all-important "service" button. High-def screens are everywhere, including, most prominently, at the terminus of each lane.

It never required much to sate a hungry bowler. A foil-lined basket with a grilled cheese sandwich and onion rings. A plate of nachos with Cheez sauce. Cold beer. With Fourth Street Bar & Grill, it's obvious these folks sidestepped the "snack bar" scheme in favor of something more fitting to the digs. Executive chef and Ohio native Todd DiCillo oversees a well-rounded menu of American comfort foods from an open kitchen.

The 100-seat restaurant features high-backed booths and tables. On a very busy Saturday night, the servers and kitchen managed to keep pace with the demands of the room. After a brief lag for drinks, service issues melted away. Martinis and cocktails are fairly priced at around \$7; beers are just \$5 a pint.

Though the menu isn't likely to snag awards for originality, it would be the odd diner who couldn't find something that sounded appealing. And prices are much more reasonable than one might expect from a "downtown" destination.

A crock of hot crab, spinach and artichoke dip (\$9.99), large enough for four to share, comes with plenty of crispy flatbread for dipping. Crawfish tails (\$8.99) are beer-battered with Cajun spices and served in a wax paper cone along with remoulade and cocktail sauce. Baked mushrooms (\$11.99) are filled with a more-bread-than-crab stuffing.

Entrées include dinner-size salads, fresh-baked pizzas, Certified Angus Beef burgers, pastas, sandwiches and hearty, comfort-style items. Marinated flat-iron steak (\$11.99) is cooked to temperature, sliced and served atop a bed of fresh romaine along with roasted tomatoes and blue cheese dressing.

I couldn't have been happier with my order of crispy fish and chips (\$10.99), which included more beer-battered fish and svelte shoestring fries than I could ever hope to eat. The kitchen even managed to dish up some tasty chicken breasts (\$11.99), simmered in a white wine sauce and served with artichoke hearts and quality mushrooms.

Neither the restaurant nor the bowling alley takes reservations. On a recent Saturday night, the wait for a table in the dining room was manageable. But the wait for a lane was over three hours. Staffers recommend signing up for a lane before you sit down to eat. Better yet, come on any other night and you'll likely dine and bowl with little or no wait at all.

Some have scoffed at the weekend bowling rate, which at \$35 an hour may sound punitive. But considering that each member of a foursome would spend less than \$9 — the price of a stiff cocktail — for an hour's entertainment, those complaints seem unjustified. And based on that recent three-hour wait, the fee doesn't seem to be stopping people from rolling.