

■ By Fred Groh

STEADY-STATE

REMEMBERING TWELVE STRIKE'S
FIRST 25 YEARS.

Some companies have a history of storm and upheaval, close calls, last-minute saves. In other companies, as an owner thinking back, you see a steady march forward on pretty even terrain. What stands out in your mind then are the things that contributed most to the mission.

That's how it is for Twelve Strike president Ron Richmond. In the company's first 25 years, three things stand out—two, if you don't count his happy marriage to Susiy about eight years ago.

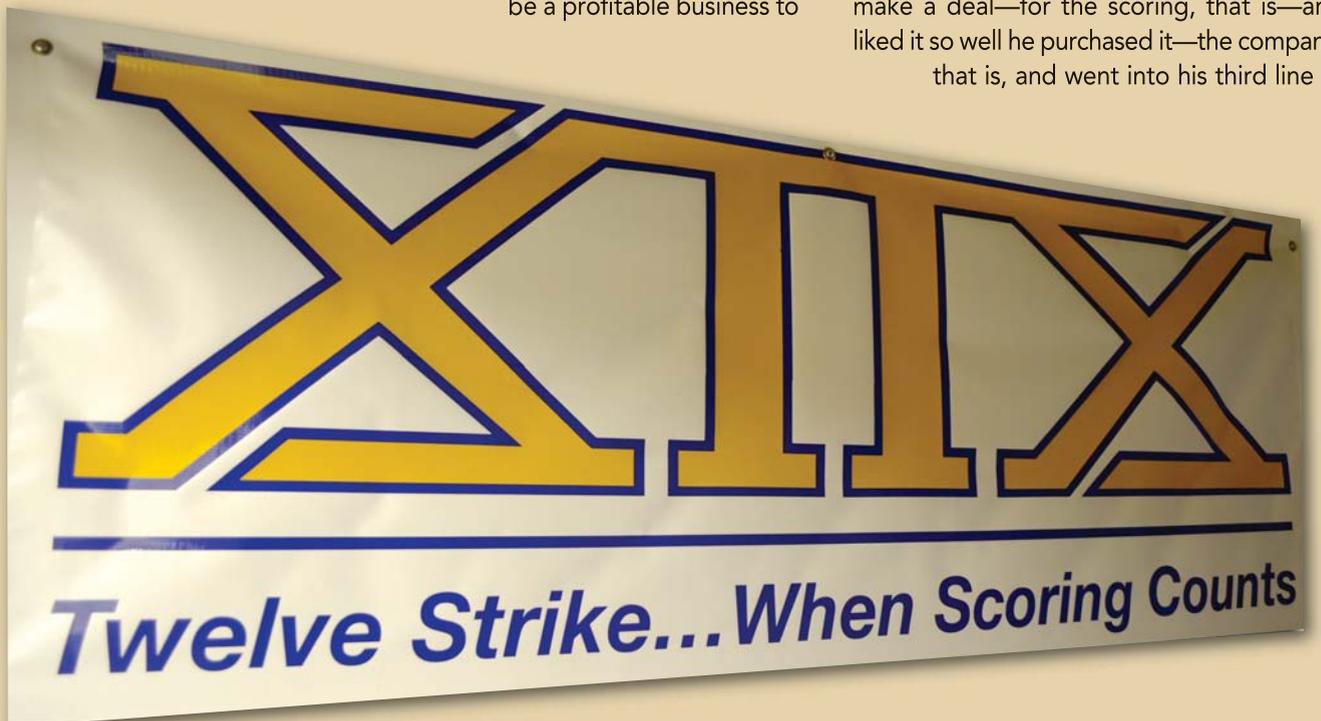
But the Richmond family connection to bowling goes back further than the company, about 10 years further, to father Rex's days as a proprietor.

He was a general contractor in Southern California who decided in the late '70s that bowling would be a profitable business to

get into. He wasn't at all a bowling man but he bought a 20-laner called Crown Bowl in the seaside city of Long Beach and proceeded to work at his two careers for the next 15 years.

Not long into proprietorship, he needed automatic scoring. "As the story goes," says Ron, "and this is only a story," Rex couldn't get terms with a certain manufacturer, went looking for another brand, and discovered EasiScor, a now long-gone company in Denver.

Whether that much is true or false, Rex did make a deal—for the scoring, that is—and liked it so well he purchased it—the company, that is, and went into his third line of



business, supplying his scoring to a Florida capital equipment company (now defunct).

When he and the Florida outfit went separate ways, Rex needed a new name for his scoring line. Charles Wood, today as then Twelve Strike's software developer, doesn't remember the exact day, "we're talking 19 years ago. But a perfect game, 12 strikes, 'That sounds good, draw up a logo,' so I did." It was the familiar 'XII'—Roman numerals for '12' and 'X' for strike—still in use.

Rex closed the bowling center in '92 because margins were much better in the scoring business. When he passed away in 2003, Ron took over. Fairly soon after that, "I needed cabinets to get made, computer cases and/or other structures that are always needed," Ron says. "A couple of local businesses weren't able to supply me with product at a reasonable rate, so I started welding and making brackets and other things I needed."

What began as do-it-yourself became one of Ron Richmond's highlights of the past 25 years: a full machine/sheet metal shop. Called Fab Metal Shop, it occupies a separate building on the Twelve Strike property in Long Beach.

"We can bend, roll, make all kinds of different parts, and we do that for all kinds of different people." From making parts of the scoring systems, he's now manufactured parts for C-17 aircraft and wheel hubs for an off-road shop, among many projects.

Fab Metal Shop makes every metal casing (pedestal) for Twelve Strike scoring. "Any metal that goes out the building—the pedestals, the brackets that hold the LCDs, the bracket that houses the camera down-lane on the capping, the cabinet that holds all the electronics for the computers—all that is made by Ron," says company rep



In the back row, left to right are Ron Richmond, James Walters III and Juan Morales. Seated in the front row left to right are Ivan Martinez and Susiy Richmond. Not pictured are Darryl Seals, Charles Wood and Gregg Pasdiora.

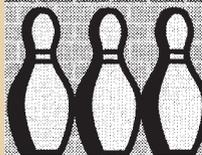
Gregg Pasdiora.

Richmond's other highlight of the first quarter-century is the conversion of his scoring from the old DOS operating system to Windows. "Having the Windows system has been a wonderful experience. We can log right into [a customer's] system [by remote access], see exactly what's going on, and most of the time fix issues they're having right on the spot."

Windows is a delight because it enhances customer service, in other words.

The Windows OS dates back to around 2005 on Twelve Strike scoring. While it

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Ron Richmond at Twelve Strike working in the metal fabrication shop.

was available in consumer PCs long before that, Wood says it was too unstable for bowling scoring, crashing too easily and too often.

Other manufacturers may have been using DOS or a proprietary system back then, he volunteers, "but I haven't looked at the competitors. That's not what we really do. We just kind of talk to the customers and see what they want, and we add the features they want."

That includes custom programming in some cases. "If [customers] have an idea they let us know and I'll investigate it with them, and we'll try and add that feature into their system," Wood reports. "Usually the custom stuff I'll leave open enough so if other centers want to use that feature, they can." It may then become part of the standard product, as was the case with the 40-frame game, now a standard feature with the scoring.

"We don't have big panel meetings," Richmond confirms. "As Nike would say, 'We just do it.' When Juan wants to make a hardware change, he goes ahead and buys different hardware pieces and he finds the one that works the best and that's the one we usually go with." Juan Morales is the principal builder of computers at Twelve Strike and handles first-line tech support. Just about everyone in the company has a hand in developing product, says Richmond.

Which—unusual in the bowling industry—relies on off-the-shelf components. "Because the last time we got something developed, probably back in '92, it was a very long, drawn-out, expensive process."

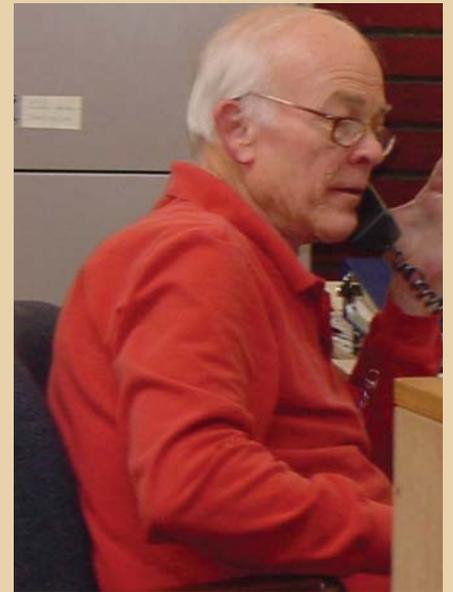
By contrast, "being [at that time] under a DOS platform, we were able to purchase hardware—video cards and/or camera capture cards or those kinds of things—right from the open market. The only thing we had to do was program those items.

"There is nothing in the system that I can think of that we've developed specifically for us," Richmond offers. "With the magic of good programmers, we're able to do

wonderful things." The payoff? "Lower overall cost [and] if I was to disappear tomorrow, they would still be able to maintain their system because it is all off-the-shelf parts."

Ron Richmond is a busy man these days. So busy he had to give up most of the installing he did personally for years. (But he's tough in holding installers to specifications that standardize the layout, the more easily to handle problems if they arise, Pasdiora comments.)

Richmond spends a lot of time in the metal shop, but tells us that's probably his favorite part of the job. "I really do enjoy taking a raw piece of metal and making something out of it, making it



Remembering Twelve Strike founder Rex Richmond as he always was, busy.

into a shape that was hidden inside. That's very similar to the scoring system," he reflects, like "when a customer calls up and asks for a feature and we look at it and say, 'We can do that.' Like the 40-frame game." ❖



Fred Groh is a regular contributor to *IBI* and former managing editor of the magazine.