



ANDREA MELENDEZ/THE REGISTER

Addition planned: Plaza Lanes owner Randy Thompson says he is going to build sand volleyball courts west of the bowling alley and Trophy's Sports Bar & Grill on Douglas Avenue in northwest Des Moines.

Need more volleyball?

Other sand volleyball courts in Des Moines:

- Sands Volleyball Club, 6214 Grand Ave., 18 courts
- Sleepy Hollow Sports Park, 4051 Dean Ave., three courts
- Several area cities and park districts also have sand volleyball courts.

Volleyball seen as way to spike area business

Randy Thompson says the addition will bring people to the Douglas-Euclid corridor.

By [PATT JOHNSON](#)
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Randy Thompson hopes to serve interest in the floundering business district along Douglas Avenue with a new sand volleyball center.

He wants to create interest and investment from other local developers by adding four courts to Plaza Lanes Family Fun Center, 2701 Douglas Ave. When the addition is completed this spring, Thompson said he will have invested about \$2 million in the 49-year-old bowling center in the past two years. Other projects included renovation of the center's bar, Trophy's Sports Bar & Grill, and improvements to the bowling alley.

"We needed something else in the area to bring people in," said Thompson, whose late father, Darrell Thompson, built Plaza Lanes in 1957.

The Douglas-Euclid corridor is one of the busiest streets in the area, but neighbors have feared the area would descend into blight after recent business closings.

The Target store a quarter-mile east of Plaza Lanes was shuttered last summer after its parent company moved the store to Merle Hay Mall, less than three miles west. River Plaza, a strip mall across the street from the old Target, has struggled to keep tenants.

Park Fair Mall, farther east on Euclid Avenue, has lost tenants, including the Iowa Department of Transportation's driver's license station, which will move to Ankeny in spring 2007.

Traffic in the neighborhood has dropped since Target moved, said Chris DeSaulniers, manager of the nearby Hy-Vee grocery store on Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway.

"So anything we can do to bring new customers to the area is great," he said.

Jeff Jaeger, who with his brother, John, owns the Chicago Speakeasy restaurant several blocks east of Plaza Lanes, said the more that local businesses expand, the more all will benefit.

The brothers completed a \$750,000 renovation and expansion of their restaurant last summer. The

investment has paid off with business almost doubling, Jeff Jaeger said.

"We wanted to show we're in it for the long haul," he said. "I wish there were more businesses that would take a look at this side of town."

Thompson plans to build the sand volleyball courts to the west of the bowling center in an area now used for parking. The center, called Volley's, will include lighting for night leagues, a sound system and water fountains. Along with leagues, Volley's will offer employee outings and other events for companies, he said.

"We are especially proud to build this facility in an area of the city that is too often overlooked for development," Thompson said.

Thompson said he is committed to staying on Douglas, where his family owns several properties.

Kevin Fina lives near Plaza Lanes and said he is glad to see Thompson expand his business.

"I am in favor of anything that will add value to the area, especially entertainment because there is nothing really out here," said Fina, 33.

City Councilman Tom Vlassis, who represents the area, said the sand volleyball courts will draw young people to the area.

Neighborhood activists said they too support the project.

"The more Randy does with his property, the more he stabilizes the area," said Brian Millard, a member of the Lower Beaver Neighborhood Association. "We'd be tickled to death if he would expand his family center even further. He has talked about some day putting in miniature golf. His influence on the neighborhood has been nothing but positive."

Thompson said interest is growing in volleyball, especially among young people, a target audience he hopes to draw.

"That would be a new demographic for us," he said.

Amy Graber, 38, of Urbandale was bowling Thursday with her children and a group of other mothers who also home school their children. She belonged to a sand volleyball league at another Des Moines center and likely wouldn't switch locations, she said.

Volley's "would probably be a younger crowd," she said. "I would picture more teenagers here."