

people | GREG PETERSON

Rack 'em Up

Greg Peterson transforms his passion into a career

BY JULIE PFITZINGER
PHOTOS BY SILAS CREWS

Greg Peterson's love for restoring billiard tables runs as deep and true as the burnished wood surfaces he transforms. Rebuilding tables is a passion he discovered at age 15 when he carefully constructed his first. "My dad said we couldn't afford to buy a table, so I decided I would try to make one," Peterson says.

It's a talent that seems to come naturally. "I was the only guy in my Washburn High School woodshop class who actually worked," Peterson recalls, laughing. "I still have a friend who calls me the Curve Buster since my class projects always got the highest grades and were sent to the State Fair exhibits."

Peterson, 57, owner and president of Peters Billiards in Minneapolis, took his love of design and construction a step further by majoring in architecture at the University of Minnesota. However, as it turned out, building, restoring and selling billiards tables became his career, while his role of architect, by way of helping to design his family homes and cabins, grew into an avocation. "Even when I was at the U, paying my way through college by selling all the pool tables I made, my dad saw that I was really wavering on being an architect," Peterson says. "So, now we have this running joke about the fact that architecture makes a really good hobby."

Edina resident Peterson has built a successful business on the favorite hobbies of others. Whether the game is billiards, pingpong, pinball or poker, Peters Billiards is the largest single-store retailer of in-home games and recreational equipment in the Twin Cities. In October 2006, they unveiled a brand new 37,000-square-foot store on Lyndale Avenue South and Highway 62.

Peterson has grown up with the business he purchased at 23 from Ken Peters in 1972. "I bought the slate, felt and balls for my first pool table from Kenny, and I just kept coming in to the store. In those days, it was just five pool tables on the floor and a woodworking shop in the back," Peterson says of the store's earlier location.

Admitting that he's not much for racking up the balls himself, Peterson believes the true art of the game lies in the restoration of the



tables. "It is really an incredible experience to restore and repair a table that has probably seen better days. Many of them have been in damp basements, or sitting on a concrete bar floor for a long time," he explains. The meticulous task of restoring tables to their previous glory, he says, can take anywhere from 100 to

200 hours. There are currently about 85 antique billiards tables in Peterson's personal collection, many from Brunswick, a major U.S. manufacturer. Several are on display at Peters Billiards.

Most of his big finds have been from the five-state area, including two from an old man-



FAMILY BUSINESS > Greg Peterson, his wife Carol and their three daughters work to make Peters Billiards a great family experience.

sion in Minneapolis. "Even when I was a teenager, I'd look through the want ads in the paper for old tables," he says.

Peterson's family enjoys billiards just as much as he does. "It's usually a big no-no to hire family members to work for you, but it's worked out great for us," he says. In addition to his wife Carol, who is the art buyer for Peters Billiards, Greg's father, sisters and three daughters are all employees.

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This year marks the 50th anniversary of Peters Billiards. Peterson and his staff are currently making plans for a celebration. "We've had three generations of family members, and really, three generations of customers who have been part of the store," Peterson says. "The great thing about this business is it's all about fun. There has never been a day I've regretted coming in to work." **E**

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