

# Chuck E. Cheese

## He's a big, lovable rat who gets mobbed by 7-year-olds

By Duane Stewart  
special writer

**STEP ASIDE** Mickey Mouse. Make way for Chuck E. Cheese. He's the New Jersey Rat. And he'll nibble his way right into your heart.

Mr. Cheese, alias "The Big C," is a professional entertainer. He got his first big break in California in 1977. Nolan Bushnell, who opened the doors to the electronic game industry with the video game called Pong, decided the world was ready for Chuck E. Cheese.

Bushnell booked Mr. Cheese at a cheesy club called the Pizza Time Theatre. His success was phenomenal. Of course, he had a little help from his friends. The Beagles from Liverpoodle had the place shaking like a dog trying to get rid of fleas.

Mr. Cheese also owes a lot to his own back-up band, consisting of Jasper T. Jowls the Dog on banjo, Harmony Howlette the Coyote on vocals, Mr. Munch the Animal on lead and raucous vocals, and the Warblettes, whose voices are like the singing of birds at the break of dawn.

AND WE CAN'T forget Pasovally, the Ed McMahon of Italian chefs, who gives Mr. Cheese his long-awaited introduction.

"And now HEEEEEEERRRRRRRRRRRRSSSS Chuck E!"

When he comes out from behind his star-studded door, in the flesh (excuse me, fur), the kids mob him. They grab his paw, they tear at his lovely grey coat, they pull his tail. There is no stopping the group of raving 7-year-olds. Little kids will be little kids.

But Mr. Cheese doesn't mind the mobs. "The more the merrier," he says with a wink.

Chuck E. Cheese and his Pizza Time Players have now achieved worldwide recognition. He is playing in 15 states and three countries. It was a long road to travel from his first gig in California. Not since Mickey Mouse has a rodent made it so big in America. It

wasn't easy. Mr. Cheese had to work his tail off to get where he is.

A new Chuck E. Cheese's Pizza Time Theatre opens Wednesday at 1241 W. 14 Mile Road at Crooks in the Clawson Center, Clawson. Along with Chuck E. and the Pizza Time Players, there will be the King, a rock 'n' roll lion who sings Elvis Presley tunes, and the Beagles, a doggie foursome who do songs by the Beatles.

You can also see Chuck E. Cheese at a Pizza Time Theatre in Sylvan Lake, White Lake, Westland, Ann Arbor and Warren. It is an entertainment concept, combining Disneyland gadgetry with food and drink. It is the best of both worlds. Even better, it is another world altogether.

AS YOU WALK through the Westland theater you feel like a mouse crawling through a wondrous maze, where at each new turn is found a different brand of cheese.

In one cubicle is Dolly Dimples, a mechanized hippopotamus who plays the piano and sings such songs as "Hello, Dolly," with the voice of Della Reese.

All it takes to get her going is a small token, which can be purchased with a quarter. It is no different than dropping a few coins in the mayonnaise jar on top of an entertainer's piano.

In another cubicle are video games and small kiddie rides, which are also run by the tokens. Skee ball is another attraction. Each time you beat a certain score in skee ball you will receive a ticket. These tickets can be collected and then redeemed at Jasper's General Store for various items: T-shirts, stuffed animals, pennants, Frisbees, candy sticks and other merchandise.

The Beagles shake their hides in another room. For one token they will play old songs by the Beatles. It is like a jukebox, but more. Little girls are often seen leaning on the stage and looking dreamily into the eyes of the doggies.

THE MAIN attraction is Chuck E. Cheese and the Pizza Time Players. In the manner of most bands, they have a

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pattern of skills, 26 in all, three-five minutes in length, which are performed every eight minutes. Their entertainment is free.

"Everybody is so happy," said Lisa Ilitch, marketing director for Chuck E. Cheese. "Everybody is smiling. It's hard to develop an atmosphere where everyone is happy."

Although the average customer age is 7, the Pizza Time Theatre is for all ages. It is a great place for a group party. In the past, hockey teams have come, football teams, senior citizens, the handicapped, and, of course, the

kids. There are good group prices on the food and drink, with free tokens given with some orders. Special birthday packages can be acquired for the little ones.

So far Chuck E. Cheese has been well received by humans. Some of his rodent friends have not fared as well.

Life has been good to Chuck E. He has his fans. A steady job. And he lives at a house where the word "cheese" brings a smile to everyone's face.

Don't be surprised if 1982 is called the Year of the Rat.



The king of the jungle is Elvis, too.



Chuck E. Cheese, "The Big C," is star entertainer of the Pizza Time Players.



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