

It's pizza with show biz

By Mary Klemic
staff writer

"I got sunshine on a cloudy . . ."
You can hear the music as soon as you enter the new eating establishment in Farmington Hills. You think that the throbbing music can't be coming from a record.

"When it's cold outside, I got the month of May . . ."

You keep walking and go into the darkened "show room" until you see the "performers" on stage. Wait a minute — is that a gorilla playing the piano, and a dog on the drums?

No, you're not having a strange dream; you're just in the ShowBiz Pizza Place. The establishment opened at 29955 Orchard Lake Road in Farmington Hills Monday.

Fatz, the piano-playing gorilla, and Dook, the dog drummer, are two of the members of the Rock-Afire Explosion, a band made up of animated robots. The band is one of the attractions of the ShowBiz chain. Other band members are Rolfe de Wolfe, master of ceremonies; Beach Bear, the guitarist; Milti, the mouse vocalist; and Looney Bird, a heckler. The shows are hosted by Billy Bob, the bear, and the Birthday Bird.

No, the new business isn't just for pizza. It offers music, television, 65 video games and kiddie rides.

"It's family entertainment," said Dan Flattery, manager of the new center, located near 13 Mile.

"We try to have something for everybody," agreed assistant manager Lee Vernier. "Kids drag their parents here and they're usually pleasantly surprised. The pizzas are excellent."

THE ROCK-AFIRE Explosion shows last between three and five minutes each. They are performed every six minutes on three different stages. New shows are programmed every two months. The group's repertoire features country, rock and pop hits.

"We go back to the '30's and '40's for some of the music, it's not just for the kids," Flattery said.

Billy Bob appears "in person" to circulate among the crowd, welcoming visitors and hosting birthday parties.

"We're having a party. . ."

For birthdays, there must be two weeks notice. The crew will set up a table, present a cake to the honoree and make an announcement, followed by the singing of three or four different songs. Such celebrations appeal to any age, Vernier said, as he recalled an incident from another ShowBiz establishment he worked at.

"I had a 92-year-old woman come in for her birthday," he said. "She was dancing with Billy Bob."

'We try to have something for everybody.'

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photos by RANDY BOIST/Staff photographer

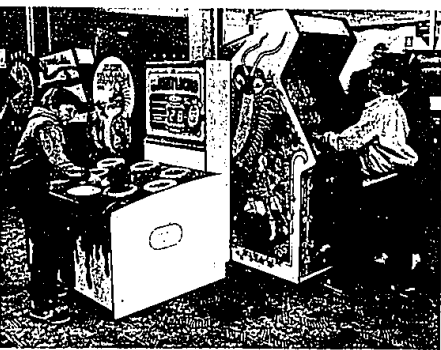
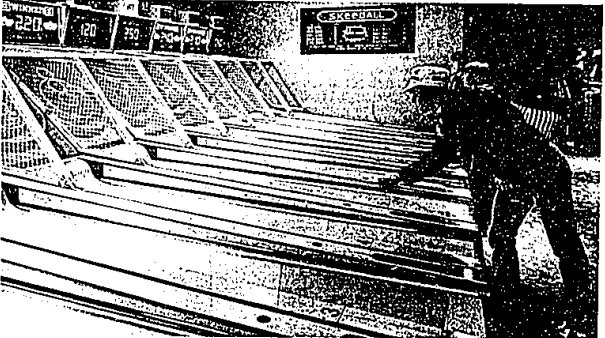
Four-year-old Jamie Kahl discusses the merits of the various kiddie rides with Billy Bob the bear.



Dook the dog pounds the skins in the Rock-Afire band.



Tom Kassab slips into the drivers' seat for a spin via video as his friend John Kassab evaluates his performance.



More than 50 games are available to help pass the time between shows or while you're waiting for your pizza. Fatz the gorilla (below) got ready for another performance with the Rock-Afire band.



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