

## Virtual bowling rolls into senior living centers Wii offers older adults exercise, social activity

By [Julie Randle](#)

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A member of the Garden Villas South team bowls a strike.

Cheers erupt from the elderly residents seated behind the teams.

Another strike. More cheers and claps. "Why I didn't bowl all along was the weight of the ball, but this solves the problem," said Eleanor Janson, 87.

Janson is just one of many older adults competing in The St. Louis Senior Wii League, which is believed to be the first of its kind in the country, said Eric Sundvold, a spokesperson for the SGSM Network, a local organization that provides services to older adults.

The league was established by the SGSM Network and Home Instead Senior Care, a company that provides care for loved ones in the home. It has been in existence for about one month.

Participants from assisted, living and community centers come together once a week at various facilities in their division to compete in virtual bowling using the Wii.

It's a hit with participants, who love the exercise, and for spectators, who enjoy the socialization.



Carl Zaegel, assists his wife, Kate, in lining up her shot using the Wii remote control for virtual bowling. The Zaegels are part of the St. Louis Senior Wii League, which is comprised of participants from assisted, living and community centers. The couple are residents at Garden Villa South, an assisted and independent living center in South County.



Future leagues may expand to include virtual golf and tennis, but bowling was initially selected because it was easy to learn, Sundvold said.

Residents at Garden Villas South, 13457 Tesson Ferry Road, an independent and assisted living facility, spend the summer learning how to use the Wii and play the game.

It has been a motivator for people to get out of their rooms, socialize and exercise, said Cheryl Engelman, wellness coordinator at Garden Villas. Her son, Dylan, 12, serves as team coach and attends every meet.

The Wii bowling game uses a console that is hooked to a television equipped with a sensor near the bottom of the screen. A player uses a wireless remote control with arrows that show up on the screen to aim the ball. When a player is ready he swings one arm in a bowling motion and presses the "A" button when he wants to release a ball. The sensor picks up the movement and timing and displays the ball on the screen.

The league features the north and south divisions. Each division has eight teams - two four-member teams from each center. During the season each center will host matches twice during the two-month span.

On Aug. 27, Garden Villas South hosted Orchid Terrace, an independent living retirement center, 4474 Butler Hill Road, and Friendship Village West, an independent and assisted living facility, 15201 Olive Blvd. The remaining south division team, Tesson Heights Senior Living Community, an assisted and independent center, 12335 W. Bend Drive, was unable to attend.

Garden Villas resident Carl Zaegel received cheers, congratulations and claps all afternoon from the home crowd. When the former bowler didn't nail a strike he received words of encouragement.

Zaegel, 87, had knocked over eight pins, another wobbled and fell as shouts of "oh" came from the crowd.

For his next shot he used arrows on the remote control to select his spot, the puts his arm in motion and next pressed the A button to release the bowling ball.

"There it is," someone from the crowd said.

He nailed the single pin, earning a spare for that frame.

"This kind of brings back memories," he said. "The only thing I miss are the beer frames - the bowler with the lowest score during that particular frame had to buy a round of beer for the team."

The Garden Villas teams bowled on one large screen while Orchid Terrace was positioned in the back of the room on another large screen and Friendship Village West

next to Orchid Terrace on a large screen television.

Tracy Bowe, activity director at Orchid Terrace, said when her team practices at their facility it draws onlookers. People hear all the noise and become curious. Several times a week team members practice and other residents join in for fun.

Bowling for the first time on Aug. 27 was Grace Cincis, 88, a resident at Orchid Terrace.

"I've never held a bowling ball in my life," she said.

Cincis' teammate, Chuck Amsler, 79, is more familiar with bowling.

"It brings back memories of 60 years ago when I used to bowl in a league," he said.