

# Puttle of fun

New game that combines bowling and golf scores big with kids

By Kathy Lauer-Williams | Of The Morning Call  
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What happens when you combine the pin-hitting excitement of bowling with the precision of putting in golf? That's what freelance art designer Ken Kleppert of Vera Cruz wondered one winter afternoon as he was putting in his home office while waiting for a large graphics file to download, and spotted his father's bowling trophy on the shelf. "I guess I've watched too many cartoons, because suddenly I just envisioned putting toward 10 tiny little pins," Kleppert says. That was the spark of inspiration that led Kleppert to invent Puttle, a game that combines the two sports. Now every Sunday, he holds Puttle lessons at the Emmaus Farmers' Market.

The game that Kleppert, now known as "Mr. Puttle," originally conceived of as a tool for golfers to improve their short game, has, to his surprise, become a hit with kids. Children as young as toddlers line up to take a swing at knocking down the three diminutive pins every Sunday at the open-air market. "This is his favorite part of the Farmers' Market," said Wendy Reiss of Emmaus as she watched son Caleb, 6, swing the putter on a recent Sunday. Blonde 2-year-old Tula Reihman of Salisbury Township eagerly shoved the putter at the ball and pins as her brothers, Mahlon, 9, and Baxter, 5, cried out in chorus, "Can I try?" A golf ball thudded against the wall as lefty Emmet Fritchman, 2, swung his putter with a toddler's enthusiasm. "He's used to whacking them in the backyard," chuckled Dad Scott as he watched Emmet and brother, Colin, 4, play. "When I see kids play, it's a joy to see how much fun they have," Kleppert says. "Even kids who aren't athletic can do it." After his brainstorm while putting in the winter of 2006, Kleppert created a prototype for the fledgling game. He shrunk down the proportions of a bowling ball and pin to the size of a golf ball and settled on using three miniature pins that could be knocked down for points on a 12-foot putt. He then developed rules for his new game. Like golf, the object is to have as low a score as possible. Kleppert also added a penalty line 18 inches behind the pins to force control and accuracy. "I thought what a cool golf training aid," he says. He enlisted Allentown woodworker Jim Neff to make wooden pins and designed packaging for the game. A search online revealed all kinds of putting devices but nothing like Puttle, so Kleppert applied for a patent, which currently is pending. That Christmas, Kleppert bought <http://www.puttle.com> as a present to himself. He has since acquired <http://www.iloveputtle.com>, <http://www.puttleusa.org>



and <http://www.puttleinternational.org> , where he has posted complete rules and instruction for the game. Following on his idea of marketing the game to the golf industry, he went to Florida to a PGA trade show, where he was overwhelmed by the amount of golfing products. "I realized I was just a little boat in a sea of golf," he says. However, many of the golf industry officials he talked to were encouraging about his idea.

"It kept me going," he says. Then at a Puttle tournament at the Unitarian Church in Bethlehem last year, an 8-year old girl nearly won the tournament. That, and his observations since bringing the game to the Emmaus Farmers' Market this year have redirected his focus. "The biggest thing that happened at the farmers market was I realized kids love this game," he says. "It's like miniature golf you can play in your house. It's so simple."

Kleppert designed an adjustable putter that could be used by even the tiniest tot and adjusts the putting length depending on a child's age. "That's the great thing about this game, both parents and kids can play but at different distances," Kleppert says. "There is a huge initiative in the golf world to get kids playing golf." And the game still attracts adult golfers. At the farmers market, Don Lobach of Emmaus showed off his putting skills by knocking down the center pin at 12 feet. "It was fun," Lobach said, adding most of his golfing practice is miniature golf with the kids or golf on Wii. Kleppert, who joined the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce as a small business owner, now plans to organize a Puttle pro-am tournament for the chamber this winter to raise money for a local charity. "I think we could have a lot of fun," Kleppert says. "It would be open to the public and I'd try to get some local pros to compete." Kleppert is at the farmers market every week handing out stickers to kids and encouraging passersby to give Puttle a try. He also has the locally made Puttle sets for sale for \$18. "It takes time to get an idea like this out there," he says. "I don't know if I'll ever get rich. I just like being Mr. Puttle and maybe one day making a living with it."

## **PUTTLE**

What: A game for both kids and adults that combines putting and bowling

When: Demonstrations 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sundays through Thanksgiving

Where: Emmaus Farmers' Market, 235 Main St.

Cost: Puttle games on sale for \$18

Info: <http://www.puttle.com>

[kathy.lauer@mcall.com](mailto:kathy.lauer@mcall.com)

610-778-2235