



On the ball

The Billiard Factory keeps San Antonio playing.

BY DAVE TURNER



The Billiard Factory offers a vast array of game room accessories — from pool tables, chalk and cues to game tables, dartboards, bar stools and lights.

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AWAY FROM HIS JOB AS A BANKER IN HOUSTON during the 1970s, Richard Sauer enjoyed the game of pool, but he became tired of the smoke and loud music in the establishments where he played, leading him to purchase a home table. In the process, he saw a tremendous business opportunity.

“Next thing I know, I’m selling pool tables,” says Sauer of his entry into the business in 1979. In 1985, he moved to San Antonio to open the home table retail center he runs today — The Billiard Factory.

The majority of the store’s business comes from suburban families, often with teenage children, but customers also include commercial pool venues.

The Billiard Factory has grown its business slowly but steadily, helped along by prosperous economic times and a strong suburban housing market. Interest inspired by pool-centric movies

such as “The Color of Money” has boosted sales here and there, as well. But in Sauer’s view, two of the most important factors in his company’s success include sticking primarily to one highly respected pool table manufacturer and offering a wide range of game room accessories.

In fact, beyond pool tables, The Billiard Factory sells merchandise ranging from chalk and cues to game tables, dartboards, bar stools and lights. “Our goal is to help a family build a game room that will allow them to function as a unit and enjoy themselves together,” says Sauer.

Pool table prices range from \$1,400 to more than \$15,000, with most customers spending between \$1,800 and \$3,000. According to Sauer, the decision to spend more than \$3,000 revolves more around furniture aesthetics than improving play.

California’s Olhausen Billiards MFG Inc. manufactures nearly all of the pool tables available at The Billiard Factory. It is the largest manufacturer in the industry worldwide and has won praise at all of its price points. With Olhausen, says Sauer, “you don’t have to spend a fortune to get good, quality play.”

Toronto-based Dufferin Games Ltd. manufactures The Billiard Factory’s \$1,400 table. “I think they build the best product for that low-end price that Olhausen doesn’t offer,” says Sauer.

Having a wide range of products and prices provides much, but not all, of The Billiard Factory’s competitive advantage. The rest remains in its expertise and after-sale service, particularly in table setup. The company employs specialists who know how to level table slates — something that can be affected by a variance as small as the thickness of a playing card. “That’s how tight the tolerance is to get a table to play correctly,” says Sauer. “We don’t farm anything out.”

Customers appreciate this attention to detail. “The Billiard Factory really takes care of the service,” says John Posey of San Antonio. “Richard is very attentive.” Posey, who purchased a pool table and accessories for his home from The Billiard Factory, says he was impressed with the company’s concern for customer needs, instead of netting the biggest sale. “That makes people feel like going back,” he says.

George Tamez, owner of Side Pocket Billiards in San Antonio, saw The Billiard Factory’s care for customers from the business side. “Different places were mostly interested in selling the table,” says Tamez, who bought 15 Olhausens from Sauer for his pool venue. “Richard got more involved with me on the specifics as to what was best for my business.”

With so many choices for the home and commercial pool table, customers can, indeed, be overwhelmed, but walking into The Billiard Factory solves that situation. Sauer takes care of the details and fulfills his clients’ needs, so they can focus on the game at hand. ♦