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THE REBIRTH OF

B OWL

Real estate
consultant
JOHN AMEND
got Dallas
CEOs to start
bowling again.
America,
you're next.

THERE IS A SINGULAR TONE, A CERTAIN PITCH OF ball on wood that the ear simply knows. Iconic, really, like the crack of ball against bat. The sound of pins colliding conjures 1960s birthday parties, shared footwear, those miniature pencils.

Usually, the characteristic clatter does not seep from a mansion on a lake. But, then again, the owner of this mansion is anything but usual. Bowling, for John Amend, entrepreneur and chairman of his eponymous commercial real estate firm, is something of a fascination.

"If you can't hook, you can't score," he says, standing on one of four state-of-the-art lanes he built in a free-standing structure next to his house, modeled 79 years ago after George Washington's Mount Vernon residence. "The hook motion creates pin action. If you throw it straight, it will deflect. You cannot," he reiterates, "throw it straight."

It is a method of play that would seem to define Amend himself, a middle-class kid from McCommas Avenue who is credited with pioneering tenant representation, a competition-boosting practice that is now *de rigueur* in the real

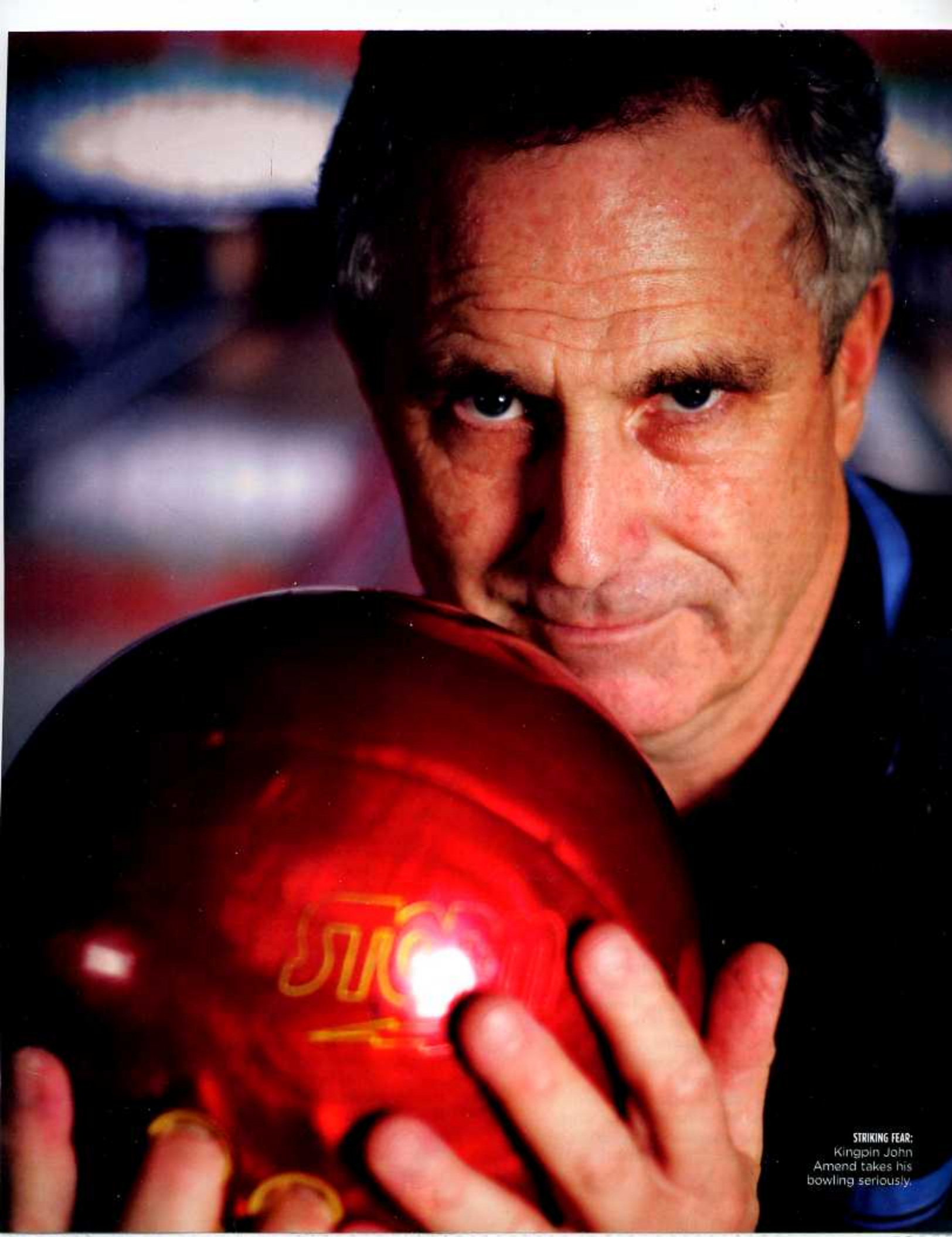
estate industry. Instead of looking for space on its own, a corporation, Amend thought 18 years ago, could come to him to do the negotiating. A prospective tenant would engage an agent, such as Amend, to exclusively manage the details of a lease for commercial space. Previously, the matchmaking process between tenant and landlord was genteel. But he developed an aggressive strategy for maneuvering the deal to benefit his client and at age 40 founded The Amend Group to test-drive the plan. Eleven years later, the firm was listed in the *Dallas Business Journal's* Top 100 as the city's fastest-growing privately held company. Now, the operation has become a full-service brokerage company that not

only represents tenants but also provides all services necessary for a move, from lease negotiation to interior design. It is smaller today, with the loss in 2000 of its largest client, WorldCom, but then, there's bowling.

Five years ago, Amend spent an afternoon with his kids at Showplace Lanes in Garland. Like many 52-year-olds, he hadn't been in a bowling alley in more than a decade. "I had a great time, so I

» THE TAKEAWAY

- 1 There's a market for "aggressive" negotiating.
- 2 More people bowl than golf.
- 3 If you can't hook, you can't score.



STRIKING FEAR:
Kingpin John Amend takes his bowling seriously.

ordered a ball, an AMF Fusion Hookmonster," he says. The problem was, he didn't want to go back to a tired, smoke-filled facility to use the new ball. He had 10 acres at home. He had designers and builders on staff. Why not simply erect the largest private bowling center in the country in his backyard overlooking White Rock Lake?

Construction on the 5,000-square-foot project was completed from the ground up in 90 days, "before my wife Teresa could change her mind." Amend realized, though, that rolling a ball down a lane, even if it was a Brunswick GS-X oiled in gradations for professional quality traction, was not so much fun when you do it alone. So, he began to study the trends. "Seventy million people bowl one time a year, versus 25 million who golf. This sport, the largest participation sport in the U.S.," he believes, "has the potential for being the best relationship-developing activity around." Through his friendship with Randy Little, a coach and consultant with ties to the Professional Bowling Association, Amend developed alliances with numerous professional bowlers and tours.

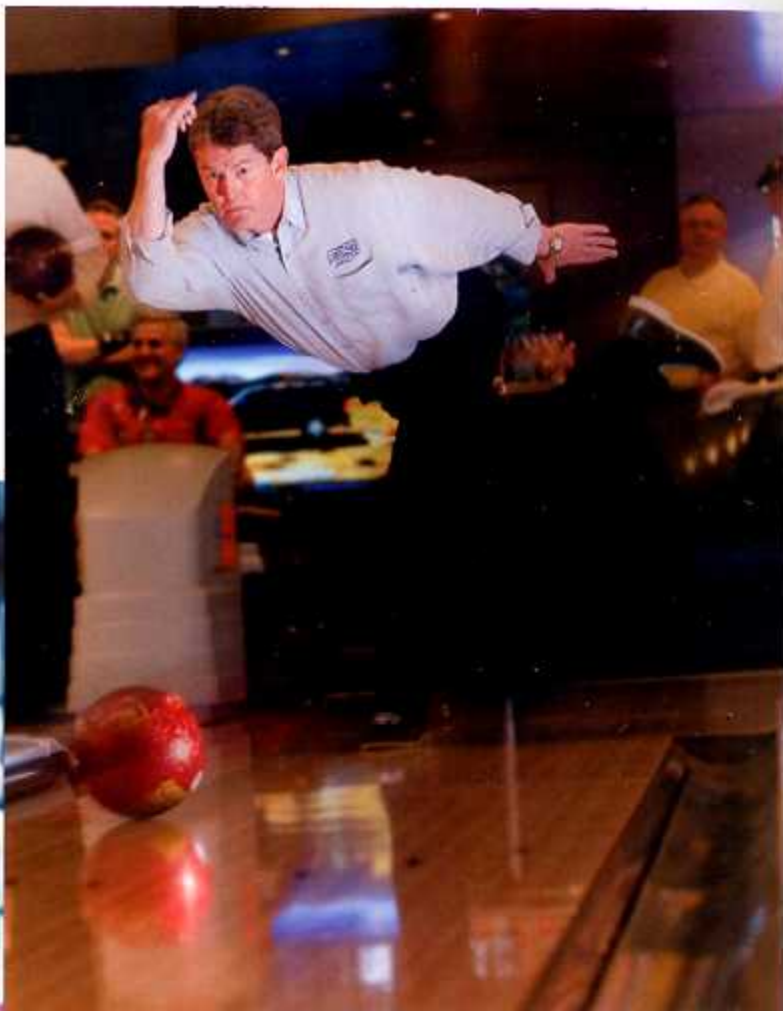
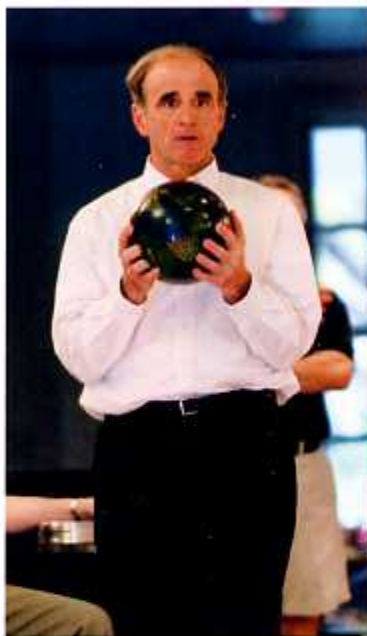
To prove his hunch, and to enjoy some company, Amend invited about twenty men to join him for a few games one Wednesday evening a month. He would supply the equipment, food and drink, a digital jukebox with 400,000 songs (and his own vocal accompaniment), as well as expert instruction from Little, who is now on staff at The Amend Group. The experiment was particularly intriguing since the invited guests had one attribute in common: they were all high-level executives.

"To be candid, though I felt fortunate to have been invited," says Marty Weiland, CEO of Northern Trust, "bowling had been a painful experience in the past. So with the image of dingy places, unfriendly help, and rented shoes in my memory bank, I was thinking I'd rather put bamboo shoots under my fingernails."

After two years, Weiland, now an enthusiastic member of Team 2 on Amend's formalized Executive Bowling League Spring Roster, has his own bag, one ball—a Storm—that hooks and one of harder plastic that picks up spares, as well as his own shoes. "They are black, for a banker," he says. "I am trying to get them in a wing-tip."

The other participants came to the sport with similar hesitation. But they all came because of their host. "John is passionate about everything he does, and one of the most generous people I know," says Bill Noble, owner of William Noble Rare Jewels and friend for 20 years. "He is a driver, yet he is humble and transparent. He will tell you about every mistake he has made."

Some of the players come straight from airports, changing from suits into golf shirts when they arrive. Ken Beam, CEO of Pegasus Logistics Group, drives an hour each way from Westlake. "The camaraderie and the



STRIKE A POSE: Thanks to instruction from bowling coach and Amend employee Randy Little (above), execs like Edwin "Boots" Nowlin (left), of Deutsche Banc Alex. Brown, throw far fewer gutterballs.

learning that takes place among people who have achieved a certain level of success is invaluable," he says.

Conversation rambles from family, to the game, to business, sometimes. But no one is doing a deal at Bowl Vern, the name Amend has given the place, in red neon over the pins, no less. "Any time you play something, when you are a Type A personality, you'd rather be good at it than not be good at it, so the idea is to work at it enough to improve," says Frank Roby, president of Holmes Murphy Texas, who bowls in the 150s, on average. "Is it competitive?" he asks with a laugh. "If we were any good, we'd be competitive."

THERE IS A PARK BENCH ON WEST LAWATHER DRIVE ABOUT 300 FEET from the Amends' house. When Teresa was 14 years old, she agreed to a date with a boy four years older whom she knew from the East Dallas neighborhood where they both lived. The date ended on the bench, where they sat and talked, maybe throwing a glance up the hill to the green-shuttered estate where the oil legend H.L. Hunt could have been inside.

From humble roots, the two had no idea they'd live in the house one day, married for 34 years with three grown children. A controller at a sales company for his entire working life, Amend's father encouraged his son to study accounting in college. He would have a stable job. Teresa and her sister were the first in her family to go to college. She graduated summa cum laude, the valedictorian of her

class at the University of North Texas. During the summers, when more affluent kids went to summer camp, Teresa's mother took her to the public library.

"I thought it was the most marvelous thing, to be able to sit and read all day long," she says, flopped in a stuffed armchair in her favorite room in the house. When the Amends moved in, the room was a closet for Mrs. Hunt. Teresa opened up the space and encircled it with floor-to-ceiling shelves for the books she has kept from her childhood and the new ones she has collected since. As vice chairman of The Amend Group, Teresa handles the company's extensive program of community service and philanthropy, and, most poignantly for her, a partnership with First Lady Laura Bush and the Library of Congress to help sponsor the National Book Festival.

The big white house on the hill feels like any other when Teresa leads the tour. There is an undeniable sense of self, of family, of heritage that imbues the manner in which the Amends lead their life. Teresa's great-grandmother was a single mom, an uncommon status for the day. She supported her children by sewing dresses and selling them to fancy ladies in town. In the Amends' kitchen, the cabinet Teresa's grandmother used to store her thimbles and threads sits atop a ledge, next to Teresa's parents' iced tea pitcher. In a sitting room upstairs, her great-grandmother's petite armchair is dressed in three slipcovers, like a timeline, the first a faded floral she sewed herself.

"We are most thankful for our family and for our friendships," says Teresa, "and have been blessed with them at every stress point in our life."

UP AT 3 A.M. EVERY DAY, AMEND JOKES THAT HE HAS NEVER HAD A good idea past noon. "[The morning] is the best inspirational thinking time for me." Lately, Amend has been thinking a lot about his current business venture.



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SWEETHEARTS: John and Teresa Amend (left) host a couples league night every other Tuesday. The digital jukebox (above) has some 400,000 songs, which John often accompanies.

There are 6,000 bowling facilities in the U.S., says Amend, most dating from the 1950s and '60s. They are obsolete, poorly maintained, and in many instances, located in unsafe neighborhoods. With nominal fees for customers, renovation is too expensive. So, they remain in a state of disrepair.

"I am working on an idea that will bring families back to the sport," says Amend. "I want to duplicate the experience of relationship-building that I've witnessed here at home."

"I think he's on to something very intriguing," says Jon Heidtke, vice president and general manager of Fox Sports Network/Southwest and member of the Executive League. "Bowling constantly rates well (on television). We all bowled when we were kids, and something like what John has in mind could rekindle the interest. And, there's not a more passionate guy about the sport than John."

The way Amend invented a new methodology in real estate, he could be charting uncharted waters once again in the family-entertainment industry. Before launching his own firm, he was a broker at the Staubach Company, where he began to develop the concept of tenant representation. Then, under his own roof, he was innovative again, integrating all the services necessary for a tenant move into a single package.

"He both had vision and executed on the vision historically," says John Reed, CEO of Bluestreak Network, Inc. and colleague of Amend's at Trammell Crow in the early 1980s. "He is absolutely known for his pioneering style of business and equally, for his charisma. But he is selective about it. He can certainly fill a room, but he really works to let his guests shine."

"LOOK AT THIS," SAYS AMEND, TURNING THE floor an iridescent blue and the lights black. "I'm a gadget guy." The concert-quality sound system plays, "Walking down the rocky road..." and the 57-year-old "Class Favorite" croons along in a navy sportcoat, pretending to hold a mic.

"A lot of successful businessmen have a fear of being worthless," he says later. "There was a point when I couldn't make enough money to make myself feel good, when winning lost its appeal. Suffice it to say, I've learned more from losing than from winning. And now," he says with a smile, "I'm at a time in my life when I won't do anything if it's not fun. And, can you believe we really get to live here?" **D**