

BILLY OATMAN, THE FIRST BLACK PLAYER TO WIN ROOKIE OF THE YEAR, DIES AT 57

by Nolan Hughes

Billy Oatman, a former PBA Exempt Tour player who started his professional career at age 40, passed away earlier this week due to complications of a stroke. He was

Oatman is survived by his daughter, Taylor Imani Haynes, and his father, William H Oatman III.

The Chicago native won the Harry Golden PBA Rookie of the Year award in 2006-07, becoming the first Black player to win the award. At 41, Oatman was also the oldest recipient of the award.

Though he never captured a PBA Tour title, Oatman's impact on bowling transcended far beyond his résumé.

"Billy was one of those guys, he was just infec-

tious, man," said George Wooten, a bowling writer of more than 25 years. "He's got that 1000-watt smile. He enjoyed being a professional, shaking hands and signing autographs. He enjoyed everything about it."

Leroy Johnson, a fellow Chicago bowler nine years Oatman's senior, said he first met Oatman when Oatman was 15 or 16.

"His mother was bringing him around and talking as if he was going to be the next biggest thing," Johnson said. "We had our doubts, but we soon learned."

Oatman bowled collegiately at Vincennes and Wichita State but decided not to make the leap to the PBA Tour. In 2006, Oatman was bowl-continued on page 2



Because of his iconic van, everyone knew when Billy Oatman was in town.

THE 2023 PLAYERS CHAMPIONSHIP MARKS PBA'S RETURN TO HISTORIC BOWLERO NORTH BRUNSWICK

by Nolan Hughes

There may be no more romantic venue in bowling than Bowlero North Brunswick, formerly known as Carolier Lanes. From an unforgettable whiffed 10-pin to the game's most transcendent quote, its 82 lanes have been the setting to many of the PBA's most spectacular moments.

The center hosted the Johnny Petraglia Open from 1991-2001, a standard PBA Tour event named in honor of the New Jersey icon. After a brief hiatus, New Jersey returned to the PBA Tour schedule, hosting seven of eight U.S. Opens between 2005 and 2012 and the USBC Masters in 2013 and 2014.

Legend upon legend captured victories in the Garden State center. Chris Barnes, Tommy Jones, and Jason Belmonte celebrated their first career majors. Norm Duke, Pete Weber, and Mike Scroggins added to their Hall of Fame careers.

The 2014 Elias Cup Finals was the last PBA event contested on the hallowed lanes — until now. The 2023 Players Championship presented by Snickers marks the PBA's long-awaited return to North Brunswick, N.J.

They say time makes the heart grow fonder. That adage rings true in regards to Bowlero North



Brunswick.

"Oh my goodness, I think all of us players are excited to get back to Carolier," Belmonte said, "In my memory, the events that we've played there had some of the greatest atmosphere from the crowd that I've ever experienced."

When it comes to selecting a favorite memory from Carolier, Belmonte struggles to distinguish between his two USBC Master's wins.

His win in 2013 was the first major title of his career. (Belmonte's 2011 Players Championship was retroactively changed to a major title in 2016.) After defeating Wes Malott, he leapt with elation after finally prevailing in his then-fifth major telecast.

Belmonte made history with his victory at

the 2014 Masters. He climbed the ladder as the No. 5 seed — no five-seed had ever reached the title match, let alone won the title — and defeated top-seeded, 21-year-old EJ Tackett.

"To put my name on that trophy two times in a row, which hadn't been done in 50 years, was pretty special," Belmonte said. "Both in the same

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Mika Koivuniemi lies in disbelief after losing the 2011 U.S. Open title.

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ing amateur events around the country when he met his wife Annette, she said.

Annette said she asked Oatman, 40 at the time, why he hadn't gone on Tour.

"Do you want to spend your life saying I wouldacoulda-shoulda or do you want to go out and see if you can make it?" she asked him.

Around this time, the PBA had adopted an Exempt Tour format. Players who could earn a spot on the exempt players list would be guaranteed entry into each event that season.

"When that Exempt Tour came around, he was like, 'This is my last chance to live my dream and to really do it at the level that I know I can do it," Wooten said.

Oatman competed in the Denny's PBA Tour Trials that June, needing a top-10 finish to earn an exemption. He finished 11th, 34 pins behind 10th-place Del Ballard Jr.

Oatman was so distraught and frustrated that he went outside to decompress, Wooten said. As he lugged his equipment to his van, his fortune began to turn.

"A bird pooped on him," Wooten said. "When that happens, that's a sign of good luck."

Oatman later learned that Ritchie (now Dick) Allen deferred his exemption due to an injury. That's how Oatman became the first Black player to earn a full-season Tour exemption.

"I'm just glad I got the chance," Oatman said at the time. "This is something I have always dreamed about. I feel like an NBA player who just got drafted."

Oatman seized the opportunity, leading all rookies in points, earnings and match play appearances and was second among rookies in average.

The southpaw came within one shot of a title, finishing as runner-up to Jason Couch at the 2007 Motel 6 Classic. Oatman needed two strikes in the 10th frame to surpass the Hall of Famer but left a 10-pin on his second shot.

"He was just so deflated," Wooten said. "He knew what that win would have done to not only him personally, but to the community, to the culture."

As the lone Black player with an exemption, Oatman became a hero in the Black community.

"All of us lived vicariously through Billy," Johnson said. "We were riding on his every shot. We felt empowered that we were being recognized by the fact that he was there and was competitive."

When Oatman bowled on TV, Johnson said leagues back in Chicago would come to a halt. Everyone would run back and forth to the bar to see his next shot, Johnson said.

But along with that honor came an enormous burden.

"He was the Great Black Hope," Wooten said. "He knew that every Black bowler in the country was going to be rooting for him. He had the charisma and all of that, but he was carrying the hopes and dreams of every little Black kid who ever wanted to bowl on his shoulders.

"He was up to the task."

Oatman welcomed the publicity, driving all across the country in a decked-out van. The van featured a massive illustration of himself and his favorite quote: You can make money, or you can make excuses, but you can't do both.

Even in what turned out to be his final weeks, Oatman continued doing what he loved.

"He loved people and he loved to bowl," Annette said. "The last three games he bowled, which was



three weeks ago, he won the jackpot in his men's league in Chicago."

Oatman's legacy extends far beyond his Rookie of the Year award. He inspired a generation of Black bowlers not only to chase their dreams, but that it was never too late to do so.

PBA Jr. ambassador Jos Weems, a 13-year-old from Chicago, aspires to compete on the PBA Tour.

"I've been blessed to have met many bowling legends. Billy O was one of them," Weems wrote on Facebook. "He invested time and words of wisdom in me. So much so that he asked for my autograph. He told Dad that he was passing the torch to me. He believed in me. He was a giant to many and because of his belief and investment in me, I carry him with me."

George Branham III was the first Black player to win a PBA Tour title, capturing five titles between 1986 and 1996. In 2015, Gary Faulkner Jr. became the second with his Rolltech PBA World Championship title.

While Oatman, on paper, could not bridge the gap between Branham and Faulkner, Wooten said Oatman represented the PBA and opened doors.

"He did a lot for the culture. He did a lot for the game," Wooten said. "For Black bowlers, that was our guy. He wore that with honor and pride.

"Quite frankly, he made us proud, man."







To Be Or Not To Be

by Dave Williams



As a youngster the question of whether or not to join a sanctioned bowling league just never came up as an argument for debate. Why else would anyone want to bowl, if not for the competition and recognition provided by USBC certified leagues?

The game came naturally to me, when at the age of 8, I first stepped onto the approach and proceeded to throw a strike, and then another strike! Two in a row on my first two rolls of the ball. I still wonder to this day if my friends added up the score correctly, because my final total was only 72. Alas, there was no automatic scoring in 1960!

The topic brings to mind the great coffee table book called Bowling Alone, by Robert Putnam. Once we all bowled in leagues, Putnam surmises, but no longer. At amazon.com, a review of the popular book from the turn of the 21st century describes the decline of league bowling succinctly:

Drawing on vast new data that reveal American's changing behavior, the author shows how we have become increasingly disconnected from one another and how social structures - whether they be PTA, church, leagues - have disintegrated.

In their latest attempt to figure out the demise of league bowling, the USBC reached out to current league bowlers and asked them for their thoughts on why bowling in certified USBC competition was important, according to writer Dave Schroeder. The result was "Why I Certify," a new multi-faceted brand awareness campaign featuring current league bowlers.

Haven't We Been Down This Road Before?

I could not help but wonder if this latest attempt would be another failure in trying to revive a sport that peaked in the mid-1970's. Schroeder continues by stating that the goal of USBC in this latest campaign is to talk to bowlers about membership and why they chose to certify. Funny, I don't remember that being an option as an 8 year old, as mentioned in the opening statement. Why would you not want to certify?

Reading between the lines, I wonder if it could be the \$13 membership fee and perceived value of benefits that's making bowlers think twice? Maybe a tiered membership program would be helpful, with lower fees for less benefits. Just a thought.

The amazon.com review continues,

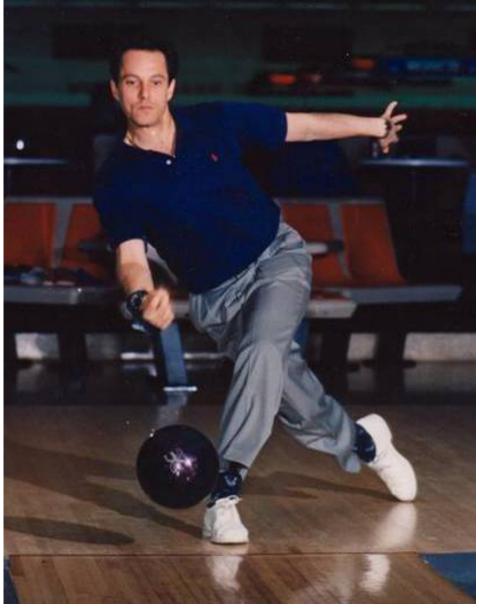
Until the publication of Putnam's work, no one had so deftly diagnosed the harm that these broken bonds have wreaked on our physical and civic health, nor had anyone exalted their fundamental power in creating a society that is happy, healthy and safe.

I wonder if the problem might be from the proliferation of information provided by computers, cell phones, and the like, making us all a bunch of couch potatoes? Without meaning to sound like a conspiracy theorist, it is nonetheless fascinating that the LifeLog project of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, or DARPA, was curtailed on the very day that Facebook went public.

Another monster conglomerate, Google, owes its true origin to CIA and NSA research grants for mass surveillance, according to qz.com. In fact, the internet itself was created because of an intelligence effort in the 1970's by DARPA. In an article first published by Jeff Nesbit in 2017 at qz.com, the following is interesting, and a bit frightening:

The research arms of the CIA and NSA hoped that the best computer science minds in academia could identify what they called 'birds of a feather.' Just as geese fly together in large V shapes, or flocks of sparrows or blackbirds make sudden movements together in harmony, they predicted that like-minded groups of humans would move together online.

Sounds scary, doesn't it? I wonder if we are being programmed to avoid joining leagues...



CONGRATS TO DAVID FERRARO — The USBC Hall of Fame inducted David Ferraro, age 63, of Kingston, N.Y., in ceremonies conducted this week. Ferraro left his mark on the PBA tour as well, which saw him collect nine PBA titles, including three majors (PBA Players Championship in 1988 & 1991, and the Tournament of Champions in 1990).

What I remember most about Ferraro is his sheer determination to win, and an unflappable demeanor, even in defeat. He also possessed a version of the non-slide, planted foot approach made popular by Pete Tountas a generation earlier. He was inducted into the PBA Hall of Fame in 1997, and in 2009 was voted the 36th best bowler among the PBA's top 50 players since their inception in 1958.

Although unable to attend due to illness, Ferraro provided the following statement in a news release from bowl.com: "I'd like to thank the USBC for this prestigious award. When I looked at all the other nominees in my category, there wasn't anyone on that list that wasn't deserving of this award. For someone who grew up in the bowling business and has co-owned several bowling centers with my brother Steve, this award means the world to me. So, thank you."

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- David Ferraro photo provided by pba.com



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Players Championship continued from page 1

In 2011, top-seeded Duke aimed for a second U.S. Open crown against Mika Koivuniemi, the leading candidate for Player of the Year. Duke struck on his final four shots, forcing Koivuniemi to mark in the 10th. Koivuniemi wrapped a 10-pin on his opening shot.

Belmonte said he remembers himself skipping ahead to Koivuniemi's fill ball, calculating how the Finnish star would secure eight pins and the title.

"Alright, so what's he going to do? Is he just going to throw it the same? Is he gonna gas on it?" Belmonte asked himself. "And then I'm watching, and the ball just falls off into the gutter."

The image of a despondent Koivuniemi crumbling to the floor as an astonished Duke grasps the reality of a seventh career major title has been etched in PBA

But if we're talking about PBA history at 1 Carolier Lane, there's one moment that stands above the rest...

Weber's strike and inimitable celebration at the 2012 U.S. Open, the fifth green jacket of his storied career, was named the fifth most memorable moment in PBA history in 2018.

The reaction was inspired by a fan's actions during the match, which encapsulates everything about what makes Bowlero North Brunswick exceptional.

"New Jersey always brought a lot of great fans and created a hostile environment so to say with the East Coast bowling community," Sean Rash said. "They bring the noise. They bring the excitement. They bring the energy. You've got the love-hate relationships, whether it's one-handed or two-handed bowling, East Coast or West Coast bowlers, international or national players. People pick a side and really go after it."



Bill O'Neill finished sixth at the 2011 U.S. Open in North Brunswick, N.J.

Bill O'Neill, who lives less than an hour away in eastern Pennsylvania, has a close connection to the local fanbase. After winning the 2010 U.S. Open in Indianapolis, coming home for the 2011 event was supposed to be extra special.

But about a month before the tournament, he said his grandfather died. O'Neill said when his family came to watch, his grandmother was overcome with emotion seeing his face on all the banners as defending champion.

Aided by the hometown crowd, O'Neill led the tournament into match play and advanced to the championship round.

"There's just nothing like having that fan support, family and friends and everybody cheering for you," he said. "It's a totally different feeling."

The 2023 Players Championship will be another emotional homecoming for the O'Neill family, as the 41-year-old said this will be the first time his kids will be old enough to be able to watch and appreciate him compete.

While Weber experienced the signature animosity of the New Jersevites, or at least the perception of it, several players noted the fan base's seasoned understanding of the game.

Belmonte said when players make ball changes and aggressive moves across the lane, fans understand the method behind the madness.

"There's an element of appreciation to the craft," he said.

Chris Barnes won his first career title in front of those very fans at the 2005 U.S. Open and made another run with a third place finish in 2009. The Triple Crown winner said Bowlero North Brunswick is one of the game's great traditional venues

"It's the people that make the places," Barnes said. "It's a knowledgeable fan base that always comes out in droves. The atmosphere is hard to replace."

Bowlero North Brunswick hosts the 2023 PBA Players Championship presented by Snickers, the final major of the season, beginning on April 30, 2023.

More information is available here.







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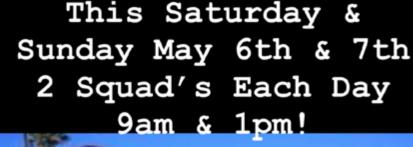
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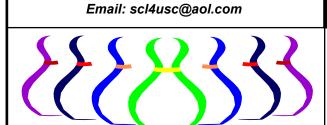
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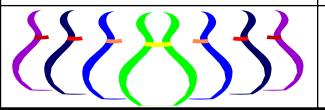
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25402 Marguerite Parkway, Mission Viejo, CA 92692 (949) 586-5300 • Fax: (949) 586-0740 <u>www.saddlebacklanes.com</u> Mgr: John Chapman • Email: john@saddlebacklanes.com

WESTMINSTER LANES - 40

6471 Westminster Blvd., Westminster, CA 92683 (714) 893-5005 • Fax: (714) 891-4225

<u>www.westminsterlanes.com</u>

Mgr: Jennifer Chow • Email: jennifer@westminsterlanes.com



San Diego

MIRA MESA LANES - 44

8210 Mira Mesa Blvd., San Diego, CA 92126 (858) 578-0500 miramesalanes.com

BOWLING CENTERS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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NORTH COUNTY USBC

Association Manager - Ross LaBar 306 W. El Norte Pkwy #95, Escondido, CA 92026 ncusbcamanager@gmail.com www.ncusbca.com (714)322-2780

VENTURA COUNTY USBC

Association Manager - Debbie Brickell vcusbc@gmail.com (805)339-9334

Las Vegas Laughlin

GOLD COAST - 70

Hotel, Casino, & Bowling Center 4000 W. Flamingo Road Las Vegas, NV 89103 (800) 331-5334

THE ORLEANS - 52

Hotel, Casino, & Bowling Center 4500 West Tropicana Las Vegas, NV 89103 (888) 365-7111

RIVERSIDE LANES - 34

1650 S. Casino Drive Laughlin, NV 89029 (888) 590-2695 • Fax: 702-298-2687 Email: Jcaudle@riversideresort.com

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Hotel, Gambling Hall, & Bowling Center 5111 Boulder Highway Las Vegas, NV 89122 (800) 634-6371 • SamsTown.com

SOUTH POINT - 64

9777 Las Vegas Blvd. South Las Vegas, NV 89123 (866) 796-7111 Fax: 702-797-8081 64 Lanes, Snack Bar, Pro Shop

SUNCOAST - 64

Hotel, Casino, & Bowling Center 9090 Alta Drive, Las Vegas, NV 89145 (702) 636-7400

Ventura County

BUENA LANES - 42

1788 S. Mesa Verde, Ventura, CA 93003 (805) 677-7770 buenalanes.com

Email: buenalanes1@earthlink.net

CITRUS BELT

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(909) 381-4599 Elise Hamner

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SAN GABRIEL VALLEY

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SAN DIEGO U.S.B.C.

Association Manager - Donald Way 7840 El Cajon Blvd. Ste 203, La Mesa, CA 91941 E-Mail: <u>sandiegousbc@gmail.com</u> www.sandiegobowling.com

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runswick

Threadworks Storms Into The Wildcard Round Lead

as they took games two and three by enough for a 4-1 result. Tony Brunning was high for Forest Lanes with a nice 613 series while Butch Jackson paced Bowlium

DOWNEY - The Brunswick Invitational hit the lanes for the fourth week of the six-week Wildcard Round with teams looking to get themselves a shot at the Wildcard Round title and the 5th-seed in the rolloffs. Scores were figuring to be lower as the bowlers moved from the high-scoring house condition to the USBC Nationals 2022 Team Event pattern.

In the top Round Winner's match, both Finishing Touch Floors (97) and Family Ties (97) leapfrogged Junior Amateur Tour (95.5) to move into the "A" match. Finishing Touch Floors took the bookend games dropping game two. Family Ties had a really rough game three score that cost them two points as Finishing Touch Floors held on for a 6-pin totals win and the 4-1 result. Vernon Adams was solid for Finishing Touch Floors with a 618 set while Vince Duarte's 573 led a balanced attack from Family Ties.

The bottom Round Winner's match saw Junior Amateur Tour (95.5) looking to increase their lead over DV8 (86) in the overall standings. Junior Amateur Tour came out strong with a big win, but it was all DV8 from there as they took the last two and total pins for a 4-1 win. Tyler Veneracion was big for DV8 with a 595 series while Kevin Valmonte paced Junior Amateur Tour with a consistent 638 set. These two teams will rematch in the "B" match next week.

In the Wildcard round matches, the "A" match featured Allied Paving (12) facing off against the tough draw Threadworks (11) who bolted into the "A" match with four wins last week. Threadworks came out strong and didn't look back as they struck to the 5-0 sweep of Allied Paving. Paul Varela was huge for Threadworks with a 713 series while Gary Duran paced Allied Paving with a 598 set. Threadworks will remain in the "A" match next week.

The "B" match was **Bowlium** (10) taking on **Forest** 1st, 2nd, 4th, 3rd. Lanes (9.5) with both teams knowing they were still within striking distance to take the round. Bowlium Rio house pattern next week as the teams battle and took game one but it was all Forest Lanes from there scores soar Monday at 8:00.

with a 617 set. Professional Approach (9) and Westminster Lanes (9) were hoping to bounce back after tough onewin matches last week. Westminster Lanes took the first two games decidedly but dropped the last game for the 4-1 win. Michael Barnett paced Westminster Lanes with a nice 629 set while sub Kevin Jones was high for Professional Approach with a 586 series.

US Foods (7) and Cal Bowl (6) were battling for their life as they sat 5 and 6 back with just three weeks in the round. Cal Bowl came out huge with a 84-pin win, took game two, but dropped game three for a 4-1 result. Ramon Torres led Cal Bowl with a 619 set while Paul Baracco was high for US Foods with a 603 series.

J.K. Inc., HB Complete Builders, Don Julio Tequila and Bowling Guys rounded out Monday's action. HB Complete Builders took the first two games by just 39 pins but J.K. Inc. stormed back for a 46-pin game three win and enough for totals and a 3-2 result. Ian Markstrum led J.K. Inc. with a nice 606 set while Kevin Cowden managed 526 to pace HB Complete Builders. Don Julio Tequila took a 4-1 result dropping only the middle game to Bowling Guys. Sub David Allhands led Don Julio Tequila with a 534 set while Preston Epps managed 530 to pace Bowling Guys.

Financial Advisor's Pot went to Paul Varela (256) for \$160 with 2nd to Eric Snow (246) for \$70. Sidepots went to Michael Barnett (259) and Paul Varela (256) for \$48 each with 2nd to Paul Varela (245) and Eric Snow (246) for \$24 each. SuperPot paid Kyle Duster (249) \$144 with 2nd to JT Diso (223) for \$72.

Oil pattern order for the 4 remaining weeks will be

Come on out and watch the teams take on the Del

TOP 10 TEAMS OVERALL

Family Ties \$102	Cal Bowl95
Finishing Touch Floors \$\$ 97	Forest Lanes 92.5
Junior Amateur Tour \$\$\$\$.96.5	Bowlium83
DV8 \$\$\$90	US Foods81
Threadworks97	Professional Approach 75.5

TOP 10 WILDCARD ROUND

Threadworks16	Cal Bowl10
Forest Lanes 13.5	Professional Approach9
Westminster Lanes 13	Don Juilo Tequila 9
Allied Paving12	J.K. Inc
Bowlium11	U.S. Foods 8

TOP 10 THIS WEEK

713 Paul Varela 617 Butch Jackson 638 Kevin Valmonte 616 Vernon Adams 637 Eric Snow **613 Tony Brunning** 612 JT Diso **629 Michael Barnett 619 Ramon Torres** 606 Ian Markstrum

SUPER SWEEPER POT

Sponsored by Dean Sanderson of Transamerica Financial Advisors Inc.

1st Paul Varela 256 \$160 • 2nd Eric Snow 246 \$70



Dean Sanderson

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Del Rio Lanes 7502 Florence Ave. Downey CA 90240 • 562 927-3351

Weekly Scratch 5-Gamer Every Tuesday

\$50 Entry Fee with Optional Pots and Brackets Check-in at 6pm • Bowl at 7pm • 1 in 5 Payout 5/2: High Street / 5/9: Middle of the Road / 5/16: Viper

Saturday HDCP No-Tap Tournament

\$25 Entry Fee with Optional Pots and Brackets Check-in at 11am • Bowl at Noon • 1 in 5 Payout 4 Games on Same Pair of Lanes on House Shot 22771 Centre Dr. Lake Forest, CA 92630 (949) 770-0055