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Renting Condos Is Fun and Games

Hoping to attract younger professionals to luxury condo buildings, developers are adding vintage arcade rooms with free, unlimited access to classic games like 'Pac-Man'



Rogeria Hanlon, right, and her daughter Keira, 9, play a hockey game in the arcade room at the Ohm in New York's Chelsea neighborhood PHOTO: BRYAN DERBALLA FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

When Chris Cochran does laundry in the basement of his Brooklyn apartment building, he occasionally slips away to rid the galaxy of extraterrestrial enemies.

"I'll wonder, 'Is he home?'" said his wife, Carolyn, a 35-year-old marketing professional.



Keira Hanlon tries her luck on a pinball machine at the Ohm, where monthly rents range from \$2,975 for a studio to \$11,500 for a three-bedroom. Use of the arcade room is included in an amenities membership, which costs \$50 a month per person. PHOTO: BRYAN DERBALLA FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Mr. Cochran can be found in the arcade room of 66 Rockwell Place, a 326-unit apartment building in the borough's Fort Greene neighborhood. Here, he's engrossed by vintage videogames such as "Galaga" and "Street Fighter II: The World Warrior."

"I was right at that age to play those videogames, in

the '80s," said Mr. Cochran, a 38-year-old field service engineer. "I remember all these games from when I was a kid."

Hoping to attract younger professionals trading up to luxury buildings, developers are adding vintage arcade rooms with free, unlimited access to classic games such as “Pac-Man” and “Donkey Kong.” Building managers and renters alike say the classic games provide both nostalgia and entertainment.

The Cochrans lease a studio apartment at 66 Rockwell Place, where monthly rents range from \$2,600 to \$10,900. Access to the arcade room’s nine videogames comes with a \$600 annual membership to the building’s amenities space, which also includes a health club and a rooftop lounge.

“I’ve had a ton of potential residents say, ‘Oh my God, wow, you have this game, this is something I played when I had a kid,’ ” said Megan Ferguson, the amenities manager of 66 Rockwell Place.

When the Ohm opened in 2010, developers of the 34-story luxury apartment building in Manhattan decided that an arcade room was a “natural fit” for the increasing number of potential residents in their 20s and 30s, said Seth Rosner, managing director of Nancy Packes Inc., the building’s marketing and leasing consultant.

“That demographic wants to do something within their building and participate in something, and that could be as simple as playing videogames,” Mr. Rosner said. Titles include “Arcade Legends,” “Golden Tee” and “Sopranos”-themed pinball.

Rogeria Hanlon, a 42-year-old fashion-industry professional who shares an 800-square-foot, two-bedroom apartment at the Ohm with her two children, often begins an afternoon session at the arcade by playing her kids on one of the room’s two driving games. “It can turn into a real competition,” she said.

The race-car simulators are rarely unoccupied, Mr. Rosner said. Monthly rents at Ohm, located in the Chelsea, range from \$2,975 for a studio to \$11,500 for a three-bedroom. Use of the arcade room is included in an amenities membership, which costs \$50 a month per person.

Race-car simulation games are also popular in the arcade room of Lowertown Lofts, a 106-unit apartment building in St. Paul, Minn. One game, “San Francisco Rush 2049,” allows players to race each other side by side. “Right now, I find the appeal of the vintage games to be more universal,” said Christine Tilly, manager of Lowertown Lofts, which rent from \$950 to \$2,400 a month.



The arcade room in Cielo Apartment Living in Austin, Texas, features mostly throwback titles such as “Frogger,” “Pinball” and “DigDug,” said Heidi Kormann, vice president of JPI, the building’s developer. “Big Buck HD,” a hunting game, is one of the most popular, she added.

Even if the upfront costs of arcade rooms are low—each of the nine arcade games at 66 Rockwell Place cost between \$2,000 to \$3,000, for example—building managers say most vintage games require specialized maintenance.

When machines break down—which happens at least once every couple of months—Lowertown Lofts enlists the help of a local resident who has a knack for tracking down antiquated parts for vintage arcade games. Each repair can run an apartment building anywhere from several hundred dollars to several thousand, building managers said.

The appeal of the games extends beyond just millennials. Ms. Hanlon, the Ohm resident, says her children now play the games she enjoyed when she was growing up.

“I was like, ‘Oh my God, there’s a Pac-Man machine!’ ” she said. “My kids were like, ‘There’s a what?’ ”

Then her kids—Luca, 13, and Keira, 9—quickly became fans. Both children frequently invite friends over to play the games. Keira met another young Ohm resident in the arcade room and the two now meet every Saturday afternoon to play in the arcade.