

SECOND ACT



Reik (second from right) shares her pinball skills with players at POP.

HIGH SCORE

Two of POP's most popular games.



**VOLLEY (1976)**  
 "Kids really love this machine because it has classic chimes and old-timey sounds. It's most similar to the games your grandparents would have played for a nickel at the soda fountain. Plus, it gives you five balls instead of three."



**WORLD CUP SOCCER (1994)**  
 "As soon as you start to play this game, the ball usually goes right into a soccer net, which makes the machine light up and yell 'Gooool!' Kids always throw up their arms in excitement—which means their ball drains because they've taken their hands off the flippers. But then they get a free ball and all is well."

# Pinball Wizard

*Ding! Buzz! Clang!* A former accountant's new project has all the bells and whistles.

**B**Y DAY, NICOLE ANNE REIK was a bored bookkeeper. By night, the 41-year-old California native was an avid pinball player, so devoted that she used her vacation time to compete in tournaments. (Yes, such things exist. And they're taken very seriously.) "At my best," Reik says, "I was ranked 677th out of more than 40,000 international competitors."

One day in 2011, as Reik sat in traffic, the not-obviously simpatico ideas of playing pinball and serving the community pinged into her head. "I was sitting there trying to zone out, thinking about what I did in my spare time, which was pretty much just pinball," says Reik. "I'd also been wanting to volunteer. And then it hit me: I could start a pinball charity!" Within months, she launched Pinball Outreach Project (POP), a venture that brought machines to children's hospitals and other organizations benefiting kids throughout California. But while the games were a welcome distraction, hauling the 300-pound metal monsters proved impractical: "I spent as much time moving the machines as the kids spent using them," Reik says.

Today POP is a twinkling, tinsel-decorated operation in a residential neighborhood a few miles from downtown Portland, Oregon, where Reik relocated in 2014. Her target clientele: school kids of all ages. Everyone 13 and younger flips for free between 3 and 5 P.M. on school days, and they all have a grand time. But it's not just fun and games. During summer camp visits and school field trips, Reik opens the games and walks her charges through the mechanics of the sport: levers, switches, magnets, ball trajectories, and audio engineering. Turns out she's the kind of teacher—and pinball machines are the kind of textbook—children don't mind learning from.

POP's mission extends beyond the clubhouse: Two of Reik's machines are on loan to Randall Children's Hospital, where she gives lessons every Friday night, and a nearby Ronald McDonald House. POP has even lent games to private homes. "We once placed a machine with a boy who has autism," she says, "and his parents used it as part of a therapy program: If he had a good day, he could play with his dad or friends. Or me! Feeling like the fairy godmother of pinball—what's better than that?" —JUNO DE MELO