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REDEEMING: Promoter Jim Lesser of JDL Companies redesigns coin-op games for special promotional tie-ins that have proven successful in redemption locations. Here, Lesser shows off reconfigured "Supershot Basketball" frequently used in tournament promotions featuring star athletes. VT contributor Frank Seninsky cites JDL's services in this month's "Crankin' with Frank," which urges redemption operators to do more marketing.



FEC Market Finds Solid Footing, Embraces More Equipment Types

U.S.A. — The family entertainment center market has largely stabilized following the contraction of the late 1990s and early 2000s, according to industry experts. Ken Vondriska, president of the International Association for the Leisure and Entertainment Industry, and IALEI executive director Carole Sjolander both admitted that tracking trends is difficult in a business that contains so many mom-and-pop owners. Yet based on anecdotal evidence, they said, it appears that the number of owners who are leaving the business has slowed, and is being balanced by those who are entering or who are expanding existing facilities.

"We have dozens of people who attend our annual 'Rookies and Newcomers' seminar [held during IALEI's Fun Expo] and who decide to enter the business," Sjolander explained. In a similar vein, both Sjolander and Vondriska said industry consultants report rising interest by potential new entrants who are commissioning a fair number of feasibility studies.

Previous years have seen clear trends toward consolidation of smaller, independent FECs that are acquired by regional or national chains, along with a reported "squeeze" on mid-sized facilities (5,000 to 100,000 sq.ft.)

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ATEI Unfazed By IAAPA's Europe Plans; 60th London Show Set For Jan. 27-29

LONDON — The Yanks are coming; the Yanks are coming... but the Brits don't appear terribly worried about it. In November 2002, the Alexandria, VA-based International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions announced that it would team with

Brussels-based European Association Amusement Supplier Industry to create a European version of the IAAPA "parks" show.

Some U.S. industry members immediately began thinking in terms of competition between the Euro-IAAPA and London's annual Amusement Trades Exhibition International. Sponsored by the British Amusement Catering Trades Association, ATEI bills itself as the world's largest amusement show and includes coin-op, parks, and gambling equipment. ATEI will stage its 60th edition at Earl's Court here on Jan. 27-29.

True to the UK's stiff-upper-lip tradition, however, ATEI officials profess to be unconcerned about the

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Vender Lineup For 2004 Combines High Technology, Proven Designs

U.S.A. — The economic recovery that seems to be gathering force can be expected to increase operators' demand for vending equipment, as workforces gradually are brought back up to strength and the pace of commercial development picks up.

The choices are varied, but most are characterized by technology that's new enough to be appealing to patrons and beneficial to vendors, but not so new as to be untried. Many of the advances that would by now have achieved widespread deployment have been, in large part, put on hold by the economic slowdown. But they have been available, they have been used and discussed, and they are no longer unknown quantities.

Increasingly, vending machines are becoming collections of functional modules flexibly linked by powerful, versatile control elec-

tronics. This is a trend of long standing, having begun with locks and coin mechanisms in the '60s. In

some designs, the controller itself is interchangeable among complex-

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CASHLESS ADVANCE: Convenience to patrons and operators alike offered by cashless payment alternatives has long been recognized, and the U.S. vending market finally is beginning to act. Here, Oscar Bucci (left) and Andrea Montanari (right), PayKey division of Italy's Microhard organization, get an update from PayKey USA's Alex Kiriakides at 2003 NAMA National Expo.

PepsiCo Integrates Brands, Streamlines Leadership

CHICAGO — PepsiCo has announced a strategic realignment of its PepsiCo Beverages & Foods (PBF) division, a move that will create a major manage-

ment center in Chicago.

Pursuant to this plan, the company will restructure its multiple beverage businesses to establish a more integrated liquid refreshment be-

verage (LRB) organization, while realigning its staff and support functions to span all lines of the PBF business.

"We are taking bold steps to make PBF the largest beverage company in North America and to further strengthen and integrate our great breakfast portfolio," said PBF chairman and chief executive officer Gary Rodkin.

PBF will be organized around five business groups. Pepsi-Cola North America (PCNA), PBF's

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PAI Pacts To Acquire 66.85% Of Shares In Sector Leader Saeco International Group

GLENWILLOW, OH — The core shareholders of Saeco International Group S.p.A. have signed an agreement with Giro Investimenti S.p.A., an indirect wholly owned subsidiary of PAI Partners, under which PAI will indirectly acquire 66.85% of Saeco share capital at a price of 3.80 euro per share (about \$4.72 U.S.). The agreement is subject to antitrust approval, and is expected to close during the first quarter of 2004.

After completion of that purchase, a mandatory offer will be made for the remaining 33.15% of Saeco International Group's share capital.

Saeco, well-known for its fully automatic espresso brewing equipment, also is the European leader in sales of espresso machines for home use. PAI Partners is a major European private equity firm with offices in Amsterdam, Brussels, London, Madrid, Milan and Paris. It manages and advises dedicated buyout funds, as

well as the former Paribas Affaires Industrielles portfolio of direct investments, for an aggregate equity value of over 5 billion euro.

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HIGH TECH, HIGH TOUCH: On display at NAMA National Expo was "Customer Service Center" from Advance Manufacturing Corp. (Elk Grove Village, IL), which offers a dedicated phone line for service calls and provision for remote refund dispensing. Here, Scott Vuncannon of Piedmont Systems (Indian Trail, NC) checks it out as Gil Pollock, Globe Tek, emphasizes benefit of boosting patron satisfaction.

Rock-Ola Mfg. Tests 'E-Rock' Wall Jukebox

TORRANCE, CA — Rock-Ola is reportedly testing a wall box version of its "E-Rock" downloading jukebox. The company debuted the floor model of "E-Rock" in Sept. at AMOA Expo and began shipping production units in October. "E-Rock" connects to the broadband network maintained by Ecast Inc.