

Montrealer beats suburban blues by opening his own retro arcade

Gursagar Singh, 20, said he wanted inject some fun in the West Island

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Gursagar Singh said inspiration for his retro arcade, Singh's Arcade, came after seeing the empty space on a walk. He said there aren't enough activities for young people in the suburbs. (Kwabena Oduro/CBC)

Growing up in Montreal's West Island, Gursagar Singh always felt like something was missing.

With very few activities for young people in Saint-Anne-de-Bellevue, Singh said he and his friends would kill time between classes at John Abbott

College either loitering in hallways or outside on the sports field.

"I just felt like there wasn't much to do in this town," said the 20-year-old.

He says inspiration struck when he walked by an empty building for sale. In an off-hand conversation with his sister, he mentioned that it could probably make for a good arcade.

"An arcade is something that sparks competition, that centres you in the moment. It really allows people to get closer together, create a memory," he said. "I felt like this was the perfect place."

His sister agreed. Singh said she sat him down and convinced him to give the idea a try.

Now, Singh is busy keeping the video games up and running, with his sister pitching in by whipping up recipes for milkshakes sold behind the counter of Singh's Arcade.

The arcade officially opened on Labour Day weekend. Since then, Singh said he's welcomed hundreds of customers of all ages.

"I just want them to have a good memory. That's it," he said. "A good memory, a good moment that they can share."

Demo Pedulla said he's excited to be able to share the retro video games he played growing up with his young son, Rocco, at Singh's Arcade in Saint-Anne-de-Bellevue in Montreal's West Island. (Kwabena Oduro/CBC)

Sharing fun across generations

Demo Pedulla said Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue was long overdue for something like the arcade.

"We grew up on Pac-Man, Mortal Kombat, Donkey Kong, all that stuff. So it's cool that I can share that with him," said the local who came Sunday with his young son, Rocco.

He said kids today are often playing handheld games at home, either on their phones or on consoles like the Nintendo Switch. Pedulla was happy there was an alternative that would get them out of the house and playing together.

"It's nostalgic for me, but it's fun for both of us together," he said.

Sean McGowan, who is from nearby Saint-Lazare, Que., said he loves the retro feel of the place.

"I really like the idea that there's milkshakes," he said. "It just gives me a nostalgic vibe."

Besides the arcade action, Singh said he's also planning to offer the space to artists for exhibitions, or as a space to host other events.

City councillor Ryan Young said it's the kind of thing the area needs more of.

"Could we do a student event here? Could we have a film screening here?" he asked. "It's great to get off the campus at John Abbott College, go into the town and do something that's more connected to wider community."

Singh said he hasn't really processed the fact yet that the arcade is up and running, but said he's excited to see what comes next.

"I just want to be creative and then hopefully being creative makes me enough money to be creative again," he said, laughing.

Based on reporting by CBC's Kwabena Oduro