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Pickleball users snapping up retail, industrial space as sports craze spreads in New Jersey

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Pickleball users snapping up retail, industrial space as sports craze spreads in New Jersey

MARCH 13, 2025



The Picklr, a fast-growing indoor pickleball franchise, opened nearly 40 locations in the U.S. in 2024 and was slated to add more than 70 in 2025, including sites in Manahawkin and Fair Lawn. — Courtesy: The Picklr

(https://www.facebook.com/sharer.php? By Marlaina Cockcroft

thate British Indian term of the Pickleball Club is opening its first facility in 13,800 square feet at Bell Works in Holmdel, while the Pickleball Kingdom franchise debuted a 41,000-square-foot location in Hamilton.

The Ace Pickleball Club franchise will occupy 27,000 square feet at Brunswick Shopping Center in North Brunswick, with Sportime Pickleball unveiling locations of 50,000 and 30,000 square feet in Our site uses cookies. Learn more about our use of cookies: cookie policy.



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Scott Schubiger

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"There's a lot of people with money and passion for pickleball," said Scott Schubiger, chief growth officer of The Picklr, which was eyeing a mid-March opening for its new seven-court, 22,500-square-foot location at a shopping center in the Manahawkin section of Stafford.

Pickleball - a mix of tennis, table tennis and badminton that draws players across age groups and athletic ability - is the fastest-growing sport in the United States, with the number of players nearly doubling in 2022, according to the Sports and Fitness Industry Association. That popularity has sparked demand for pickleball facilities around the country.

Developers say pickleball fits in locations from retail to light industrial because courts can operate in a variety of spaces, depending on the

type of facility and what it offers. Some only have courts, while others offer food and beverages and contents in the member lounges, which might drive a higher rent. Indoor facilities enable people to play year-round.

spreads-But pickleball seemed like a gamble in 2020, when NAI DiLeo-Bram & Co. arranged an 11,200-squarefoot lease in an industrial building at 19 Royal Road in Flemington for the newly formed Flemington istrated Club. Marc Shein, a senior vice president with NAIDB, said the firm agreed to handle one of the first such facilities in the area because the building was zoned for recreation and already air-(Consociation of the consociation of the conso

"We were scratching our heads going, 'How are you going to make a lersey/) living doing this?" he said. After that, pickleball courts "started popping up all over the place," including 527 Stelton Road in Piscataway, where NAIDB arranged a 2023 lease for a 17,500-square-foot indoor sports facility with pickleball courts, badminton courts and batting cages.

Shein estimates there are now more than 70 pickleball locations in New Jersey.

New spaces include the 14-court Pickleball Kingdom at 1100 Negron Drive in Hamilton, part of a development by Denholtz. Kris Hurlbut, the firm's senior vice president of leasing, said it had been having trouble finding industrial tenants for the space before coming to terms with the franchise, whose grand opening was set for February.



Marc Shein

Hurlbut admits that Denholtz was hesitant about the deal.



Kris Hurlbut

"I remember the pandemic," she said. "We got hit with all of our recreational tenants, and it was difficult." Yet the franchisee has had success with other franchises, and Denholtz was able to get market rate for the space, so "we felt very comfortable with him."

Others say the COVID crisis is the reason pickleball is catching on. Schubiger, who lives in Morristown and Long Beach Island, said the game is bringing people together after COVID: "It's the human connection that we all desire right now."

Levin Management Corp. CEO Matthew Harding said people started to play it outside during the pandemic.

"Since then, there's been tremendous growth in pickleball," prompting the restriping of existing courts or addition of facilities outdoors. Over the past year or two, he said, franchises have begun to build pickleball-specific facilities.

Levin Management handled one such facility, Ace Pickleball Club at 498 Milltown Road in North Brunswick, which is slated to open by the end of 2025. Fitness and entertainment are good additions to retail, and the pickleball club is "a great draw," Harding said. **ACCEPT**



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The Picklr, for its part, was slated to hold its New Jersey grand opening on March 15 at 205 Route 72 West in Manahawkin, replacing what was a Bed Bath & Beyond at the Kohl's-anchored center. The facility had more than 400 members signed up before opening, Schubiger said, while another location, at 18-01 Pollitt Drive in Fair Lawn, is opening at the end of March.

Schubiger, a 15-unit franchisee in addition to chief growth officer, was confident that pickleball would be "the next unicorn in franchising" when he joined The Picklr in 2023. He called New Jersey "the most target-rich environment for pickleball because it's highly densely populated with high household income," and "anybody from the ages of eight to 85 that can hold a paddle" can play. The Picklr expects to open more than 20 locations in the state in the next four years.



Matthew Harding

Pickleball facilities can be flexible because the courts are smaller than tennis or basketball courts or indoor soccer fields, Shein said. What they need most is adequate parking, clear height and wide column spacing.

Harding said even older industrial buildings have the necessary height - at least 20 feet interior - and can offer lower rents than a shopping center.

As for retail, shuttered chain stores can be good candidates for pickleball clubs. Shein suggested Rite Aid or CVS, while Schubiger named Bed Bath & Beyond, Big Lots or Hobby Lobby buildings. He said The Picklr does well in power centers like the Manahawkin location, because people use the facilities for an hour or two, providing a regular churn of cars.

"Those types of neighbors love us," he said.

The landlords said pickleball doesn't require too much work for ownership. Generally, the tenant handles the interior buildout, Harding said.

Opinions were mixed on how pickleball will play in the long term. Hurlbut isn't sure all the facilities will survive. Shein said, "Everything is cyclical. Look how many years indoor racquetball courts were the big thing," but they're being converted into pickleball courts.

Schubiger, though, said the pickleball demand isn't close to being met. New Jersey already has a professional team, the New Jersey 5s, and he thinks pickleball will move into high school and college sports.

Harding isn't worried about pickleball losing steam. But then, he also plays. He said, "I think it's here to

Marlaina Cockcroft is a freelance writer based in New Jersey.

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Joshua Burd, an award-winning reporter and editor, has been covering New Jersey commercial real estate for 13 years. Many industry leaders view him as the go-to real estate reporter in the state, a role he is eager to continue as the editor of Real Estate NJ. He is a lifelong New Jersey resident who has spent a decade covering the great Garden State.

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