

Splatball, Inc. comes to North Minneapolis

Written by Shaina Brassard, West Broadway Coalition
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It's been less than three months since Jim Emmerich welcomed players into his new paintball facility at 2921 N 2nd Street, but the owner of Splatball, Inc. is feeling settled in and happy to be there.

Emmerich, who has been working in the paintball industry for 17 years, chose the north Minneapolis location after he got news that his indoor Splatball location on University Avenue in Dinkytown, near the TCF Stadium was going to be demolished.

"The move has been wonderful. We had more visibility over there but this facility is phenomenal. This is our third indoor facility, so we had the opportunity to take the lessons from the prior two and apply them," said Emmerich. "(We've) gotten an amazing reception from the neighbors."

The spacious indoor paintball facility is one of Emmerich's four paintball establishments in the area. There's an outdoor field in Jordan under the name Action Packed Paintball Games, the indoor Air Assault Paintball in Maple Plain, and a final outdoor Splatball, Inc. facility in Rogers. The North 2nd Street Splatball has become something of a headquarters, and boasts a fully stocked shop where players can purchase equipment.

For those unfamiliar with paintball, Emmerich describes it as a "giant, grown up adult video game." Players are divided into teams and equipped with guns that contain paintballs, which are composed of a non-toxic, biodegradable, water-soluble polymer paint that marks one's

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opponent when hit. Players also wear protective masks while they navigate the game field, which is scattered with natural or artificial terrain used for tactical cover. The objective of the game is often compared to Capture the Flag, but the rules can vary depending on the type of space. Typically, games at the North 2nd Street location last between five and 10 minutes. After the winning team is left standing, players leave the field to clean off and reload and get back out for as many as 15 games over the course of two or three hours. Referees monitor the game, making sure everyone is safe and following the rules.

At Splatball, and all of Emmerich's paintball facilities, there are two different types of play – walk-on play and reservation play. Walk-on play, essentially a big game of pickup, happens Friday nights from 6 p.m. –11 p.m. and Sunday afternoons between noon and 5 p.m. Players pay a \$20 entry fee and can rent equipment or use their own. Groups of eight or more can call and schedule reservation play almost anytime other than walk-on hours.

Those that have never tried paintball before are in good company. Emmerich says that the majority of his customers have played between less than three times. Many are introduced to the game when they're invited to gatherings such as corporate parties, bachelor parties, birthday parties and even end of season sports team parties. There's ample space with tables and chairs for groups to bring in food, and there are large windows so that parents or those in the sitting area can watch the game while eating cake and socializing. Players can be as young as 10 years old; those under 18 years of age must bring a waiver signed by a guardian.

New players are also in good hands at Splatball because Emmerich knows his paintball.

He started playing during senior year of high school. When he went off to college, he found the local paintball facility.

"One day the owner threw a referee uniform at me and said, 'You're hired,'" recounts Emmerich.

Though he hadn't even asked for a job, it was obviously meant to be. Working at that facility for four years during college gave him an opportunity to learn the business. Seventeen years later, he's still working in paintball. He now manages around 25 employees spread out at his four locations, and is still looking to add staff. "This is what I do. I've always been an entrepreneur my entire life. I was the kid that had the lemonade stand," explained Emmerich.

As Minnesotans brace for more winter, practicing indoor paintball at Splatball on North 2nd Street in north Minneapolis might be the perfect activity. Those starting now will be ready for the outdoor fields right when spring rolls around!

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