

Ask Pneuman

The Pneumatic Soothsayer/Fortuneteller That Answers Questions from the Beyond!

Matthew Jaster, Senior Editor

Escape Rooms have been popular in recent years for their challenging game play, group participation and unique time constraints.

Teams have X amount of time (typically 60-minutes) to solve puzzles, ponder riddles and dissect clues in order to escape a variety of themed games. This could include stealing a famous Van Gogh painting or being transported to an Egyptian tomb. The possibilities are endless. And the concept is just, good ole fashioned fun.

One common thread with Escape Rooms across the country, however, is the less-than-exciting reception area. There's always a room where you wait for the game to start. Typically, this time is spent staring at walls, walking in circles or eavesdropping conversations.

The owners of Skeleton Key, an Escape Room experience in Hartford, Connecticut, decided the reception area should be as interesting and inventive as the Escape Room itself. So they came up with the idea to create "Pneuman," a steampunk pneumatic tube system that guests can ask questions—much like the popular Magic 8-Ball—and receive answers from the beyond.

"Years ago, I had purchased a late 1800s brass pneumatic tube system that came out of a department store in the Midwest. I've wanted to use it in a unique project, but couldn't find the right situation to make it happen," said Bruce Rosenbaum, Modvic, LLC. "When the folks at Skeleton Key came to me about their Escape Room idea – they actually were thinking about doing a more modern pneumatic tube version (like the clear tubes they use for bank or hospital applications). My tubes were solid brass – so my system was not going to fit."

With some ingenuity and creativity, Rosenbaum took an old, early 1900s Addressograph machine (dog tag maker) that would be the perfect 'platform' and interactive base for a modern pneumatic tube system.

"The client provided me the door/tube component and I married it to the platform for the fusion of old and new coming together," Rosenbaum said.

Skeleton Key patrons can huddle together and ask Pneuman personal or political questions or simply questions about the game itself. The pneumatic machine will send answers (from the Great Beyond) to any question posed—keeping folks engaged and busy prior to entering the escape room.

"Staff and customer's alike, love Pneuman with all our hearts," said Leanne Brennan, Skeleton Key West Hartford. "He is the only pneumatic tube in Connecticut with a sassy personality and a connection to the spirit world."

The client used a pneumatic tube company to install the system. Simply, a clear acrylic tube that links to sending



Leanne Brennan says both staff and customers enjoy the interaction with Pneuman at Skelton Key West Hartford.

and receiving stations. An air compressor/motor pump is installed at the receiving station which can suck (like a vacuum cleaner) or blow air. When it sucks air, it *pulls* loaded canisters along the tube toward it. When it blows air, it *pushes* the canisters in the opposite direction. The tubes can go along straightaways or easy curves to cover the areas of necessary travel.

Inside the tube are the answers to the world's most trivial questions.

Rosenbaum's company Modvic specializes in steampunk art and design. He says the company is currently working on a variety of interesting steampunk projects including a monowheel time machine, a multi-station coffee brew bar, a redevelopment chocolate factory sign using an antique candy kettle and much more. He appreciates the opportunity to use steampunk to enhance the customer experience at Skeleton Key.

"Steampunk art and design at its essence is about creative problem solving, collaboration and resilience," Rosenbaum said. "Those are the exact skills needed to successfully get in and out of an Escape Room." (www.modvic.com) (skeletonkey.com) **PTE**