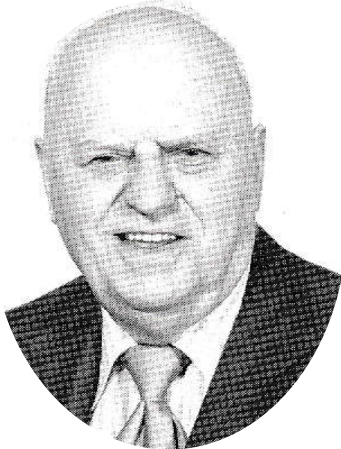


## *William F. Gonch*



**W**illiam Francis Gonch gained national recognition as a top performer in two sports — bowling and pocket billiards. In his long career in both sports he defeated three world champions in pocket billiards and tied a duckpin record in bowling. He defeated Carl Vaughan, national pocket billiard champion, in two matches in the early 1930s, beat Jack Otto of Torrington, state and national pocket billiard champion, and then was the winner over Erwin Rudolph, also known as the Masked Marvel. Rudolph lost only 12 out of 1,512 matches when Gonch took him.

Bill competed against seven world pocket billiard champions. He rates his string of 98 against Charlie Dattalo of Norwalk as the best pocket billiard game he ever played.

Gonch also was well known among the duckpin bowlers in the country. He tied the world duckpin record of 633 in five games set by Nick Tronsky of Willimantic. His team, known as Gonch's All Stars, were ranked with the top combines in the country. The team consisted of Charlie Garfield, John "Red" Keri, Bill Kerri, Meyer Schulman, John "Carp" Downey, Frankie Cavallo, and himself. One of the team's big wins was scoring a big victory over Joe Harper's Holland Five of Bridgeport, then world champions. Today only Bill Keri now in Florida and Gonch remain from the great bowling team.

Bill came to Norwalk when he was six years old from his native Bristol, PA, when his father, Leo Gonch, Sr., took over the management of the Mahackemo Hotel in West Washington Street. He developed into a great performer in pocket billiards and duckpin bowling at the old Clifford Alleys in South Main Street run by Bill "Smiler" Ayrault, Charlie Hamilton, and Arther "Cap" Wick.

Gonch, also known as Willie as well as Bill, was associated with his father in the hotel for a quarter of a century. After that he became a salesman for a beer distributor and is now in retirement.

Bill also introduced darts and shuffleboard to Norwalk. His teams in both of these sports claimed state championships as they were never defeated.

Gonch actually had three championship teams — his All Stars in bowling, and the Old Wells in darts and shuffleboard.

Bill is married to Helen Janci and they live at 6 Trailside Drive. They have one daughter, Mrs. Eve Ann Fitzgerald of Weston, and three grandchildren.