

Retail

A fully automated pingpong facility set to open in River North this weekend

By Corli Jay
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<https://www.chicagobusiness.com/retail/pingpod-chicago-opening-river-north>

As paddle sports such as pickleball gain popularity, a company focused on pingpong is headed to River North, giving players nearly 24-hour access to the game.

PingPod Chicago is set to open at 676 N. LaSalle St. in a 2,000-square-foot street-level space Dec. 2, creating what the company calls the world's "first tech-enabled autonomous table tennis pods."

PingPod, which launched in New York in 2020, boasts of keeping labor costs low by having no on-site employees and allowing table rentals in 30-minute increments.

"We look for locations that are in very vibrant neighborhoods that have a diverse cross-section of people and communities," said PingPod co-founder and Chief Financial Officer David Silberman. "It's great if we have millennials and kind of young professionals, but it's also good when we have families and older populations. We think that River North checks a bunch of those boxes. It's a very well trafficked, vibrant neighborhood and it's very visible."

The Chicago location will be open from 6 a.m. to 2 a.m., said Silberman. Players can register for tables through an app, using their phones to gain access to the building. Rentals typically cost \$20 per hour, with membership options starting at \$70 a month.

Silberman, who founded PingPod in 2019, said business boomed as people sought activities during the pandemic and has continued to expand. "I think people these days are really looking for social activity and community, and that's what we do really well."

The venture is led by California-based investment firm Sequoia Heritage along with dozens of other investors — some coming from the pickleball space — and has raised more than \$10 million to date, according to Silberman.

PingPod currently has 15 locations in New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia, Boston and the U.K. Upcoming sites include a second space in Boston, along with the soon-to-open River North space and two locations in Miami. The company has registered more than 60,000 people in its three years, according to PingPod.

"We think that the city of Chicago is going to take to PingPod really nicely because Chicago loves sports and it's a very active city," said Silberman. "During the cold part of the year when people are flocking to indoor facilities and activities, I think we're going to offer a really nice destination."