

GENEVA FOLLIES

Throughout the years, Geneva generated many humorous moments. Good Geneva stories often bring laughter every time they are told even if repeated over and over. I thought refreshing our minds to some comical doings would be lots of fun. Many may learn of the past and of the individuals who brought about these historical events for the first time. The intention of this article is to warm Geneva hearts and bring a Geneva smile on your face.

“Where would you begin?” Mini-Legend Jerry Graves asked when told of my plans. Let’s start from the beginning, the very first day. The initial round was played on Deer Lake Golf Course near the State camping grounds and not on the fame Geneva-on-the-Lake spread. It was the only round ever played on that track. Deer Lake rented three-wheeled, one-man carts. Outlining the seven of us roam from rough to rough on each hole, looked like a telestrator after John Madden drew up a Peyton Manning pass play. Picture Jim Nogawick, 6’5” tall and weighing 250 pounds, sitting in one of the carts only fitting if his knees touched his chin. It was a sight a half of century later still hard to forget. That was an adult Dodge ‘Em ride. We graduated from three-wheeled golf carts to Go-Karts. There was a track on the Strip close to Yankees Bar and Grill. The competitive juices from golf carried over to the racetrack. The gauntlet was thrown. The race was on. Determined to win and with Mario Andretti skills, Little Jerry Graves made a practice on every turn to run his competitors off the pavement and into the rubber tires surrounding the track, put into place to protect the innocent bystanders on the sidewalk. We were banned from ever partaking again. We caused quite a stir that the following year was a no-go. Alcohol may have played a role.

From three-wheeled carts to Go-Karts to the Godiva Walk. Several years in a row, one could look between the trees towards No.15 fairway and catch a frightening glimpse. If you did not know any better, one might think it was Sasquatch strolling along. This creature was covered in hair except the dome of his head and exhibited a package between his legs

swinging from side to side damn-near down to his knees. Not a stitch of clothing on his body. It was Legend Vince Gatto proudly entertaining the Geneva field. The Godiva Walk turned into full gallop one year. On a hot day as Vince was finishing his round stomping down the 18th fairway, a maniac came from the trees sounding like a Sioux Indian in battle, in hot pursuit of the Legend. It was an obvious case of mistaken identity. Vince had covered his head with a wet towel to stay cool. He was wearing clothes, shorts and T-shirt. Still, plenty of skin exposed and tanned a dark caramel color that one would expect from a Sicilian decent. The nut from the Village mistook Vince for an African American and took upon himself to rid Geneva of unwanted visitors. Vince was in better shape then and outran the Village idiot to safety.

Others have humored us besides Legend Vince Gatto. There was Mike Akers who drove his golf cart, clubs and all, a half mile down the Strip to purchase cigarettes between nines. This was long before the Village allowed the rented carts we see roaming through today's Geneva. Mike was a trend setter. Another person using a golf cart to his advantage was Mel Voll. It is not a stretch to conclude Mel was not a gifted golfer. It is not a stretch to infer Mel has been a unique personality, full of humor and spirit that fit like a puzzle piece into the Geneva fraternity. Many nights found Mel standing on Pera's veranda telling parables with a much different message than preached 2,000 years earlier. Mel was a soothsayer of a different breed. Knowing his game was of no help to his teammates, except possibly on the green, he came to a Scramble with no bag, no clubs, only his putter on the cart.

Golf carts and Go-Karts were too puny for Steve Hoffman. He reached for much bigger notoriety. His memorial feat came in a car. Not any car, but one which the word POLICE was written on the side. After thoroughly enjoying himself on Geneva's Strip, Steve needed a ride back to Pera's. The Geneva-on-the-Lake Police Department was more than happy to oblige. Unfortunately for the officer, his cruiser was rewarded with recycled beer and steak. Trying to get Mr. Hoffman to clean his mess was hopeless. Giving up on this idea, the policeman drove Steve to his room. Lesson learned? Sort of. The next year instead of exploring the Strip, Steve

stayed close to Pera's and drank in the establishment across the street. Around closing time, Mini-Legend Jerry Graves stopped for a nightcap and found Mr. Hoffman, head on the bar, sound asleep. At the bartender's request, Jerry was to get Steve out of the place so as to close. Steve woke for a matter of seconds, long enough to put his feet on the floor then down fell the rest of him back asleep only this time sprawled on the barroom floor. Those were the only two years Steve Hoffman blessed us with his company. Geneva was too much for him.

There were many others who overindulged and did silly and stupid things. Scott Riffle comes to mind. If you ever watched the Andy Griffith Show, Scott is the spittin' image of Ernest T. Bass. Their physique and mannerisms were much the same. Scott liked his beer. By the time he staggered to the first tee, he was two sheets to the wind. He rode to Geneva with the Boggess brothers who picked him up somewhere around Chillicothe or Circleville. Plenty of time to consume a 12 pack by noon. He drank through 18 holes of golf and well into the night often until closing time. This was a yearly routine. One night he forgot his room number. He tested every door until he found one unlocked. He climbed into bed with an unsuspecting couple. They were a good sport about his confusion. He was lucky. Many Geneva-on-the-Lake visitors are from Pigspuke, Pennsylvania and my experiences found Pigspukians very unfriendly.

One Geneva Saturday night, Scott was so drunk, he was kicked out of the Swiss Chalet three times. He would wander after his exile and find another door to the establishment. I do not think he knew he was reentering the Swiss Chalet. Dean Martin once said, "You are not drunk if you can lay on the floor without holding on." Scott lived this philosophy. There was another character who experienced the same fate. Billy Baum pushed the envelope with his costume. Over his khakis, Billy donned a pair of naked buns. They looked real. It is a good thing the plastic tush could not fart because Billy was the kind of guy who would think it appropriate to stink us out. He thought himself to be funny. Some of the local female clientele did not. Like Scott, he was shown the door three times.

Far be it from me to criticize anyone who could not handle their liquor. My story is repeated every year. You know, the one when I was so intoxicated that I could not stand up and fell like a lead balloon on top of one of Pera's antique tables and broke it. It is still hard to believe how one man can do so much damage just trying to walk to the bed. The room looked war torn. I was told when I pissed, I missed the toilet and washed the corner of the bathroom wall. I do not know. I do not remember. If it was not for the efforts of the late Ralph DiCarolus, I may have hurt myself that night.

Not all Geneva's humorous moments were caused by alcohol consumption although this next incident took place at Yankees Bar and Grill. Girls Gone Wild were performing. Looking to the stage, a perfectly sober Jim Centorbi joined the gals and performed as if he was part of the show. The dancers appeared amused by his antics. I am not sure the reason, but I surmise they saw this old man, harmless, having the time of his life. Jim was thrilled.

Let's take this piece to the course. Remember golf? That is why we convene in Geneva every year. To think this nearly did not make it into the new century. It was the Scramble Tournament. Maybe four other foursomes were on the course besides our 32 guys, and they were in front of us. Lo and behold, two Scramble teams joined together creating an eightsome. Not a course in the world allows eightsomes. When Geneva club pro, Chuck Webb, confronted our outing, Legend Vince Gatto came to our defense. It was a weak defense but none the nonetheless he pleaded our case. Mistake! Chuck held all the cards. The longer Vince stated our reasons, the hotter Chuck became. "There's nobody on this course but us," Vince argued. We were wrong and Counselman Gatto knew we were wrong. Yet he defended our actions. Matlock would be proud of him. After overnight consultations, we convinced Vince to apologize the following morning and Chuck accepted and Geneva lives on.

Thank God amends were made. This gave Vince the opportunity to show off his driving skills. He teed his ball atop a Michelob bottle. His wooden driver securely in his hand, he wacked at the ball. All he hit was

bottle. Shattered glass sprinkled across the tee box looking like hail in the July sun. What was not on the grass was embedded in the head of his driver. Weeks passed before all the fragments were disbursed. Vince's mangled trick came minutes after Bob Luzader performed his magic. Buck put one ball on top of another which is a trick in itself. He was not done, however. Grabbing a sand iron from his bag, he addressed the balls. As if blasting from a green side bunker, he hit perfectly under the bottom ball popping the top ball high in the air. Cool as a cucumber, Buck opened his front pocket, and the ball fell inside as planned. I have not seen a golfer perform that trick since.

Another memorable shot on Geneva's golf course was hit by Jim Nogawick. There used to be a shelter house in the trees next to 15 fairway behind 12 tee. Everyone on the 12th tee box, 13th green, 14th, 14th, 15th, 16th hole, and 17th tee heard the noise that sounded like rapid gunfire. Noggy hooked his tee ball on 15 directly into the shelter house. The ball rattled for several seconds hitting all sides numerous times and bouncing off the ceiling before coming to rest battered and beaten like grandma's old wardrobe. Nogs hit his next shot from the shelter to the fairway and, like grandma, emerged with a huge grin as if there was anything to worry about.

The inflatable rooster standing proud across the way from the Summertime Inn had plenty to worry about, especially when Ron Szymczak was in the mood. After closing Yankees Bar and Grill and shuffling his way back to the Summertime Inn, there it was, full of hot air and sporting a smile that Ron mistook for an invitation. Mr. Szymczak humped the rubber cock to a state of deflation. The debt for such misconduct was realized the next morning. Ron suffered cracked ribs, and the rooster laid airless on the ground.

These are just a few of Geneva's moments that come to mind. Many more can be told. If anyone wants to share their stories, please let me know. Sequels are prominent in our society. Enough new content will encourage a second edition of Geneva Follies. The great thing, no matter the silly and preposterous deeds we enact, we always make it back. The

journeys of Nick Boggess best exemplifies that fact. He drinks until he loses his way but manages to find his room somehow. There was the time he stumbled around 18 fairway following the stars when, like a Lighthouse on Lake Erie's shore, orange cones led him home. There was a deep hole on the Geneva grounds and the cones protected anyone from falling six feet into the dirt. Nick recognized the cones from the day's golf and in his drunk stupor, made it to his room. Many of us can relate to Nick's journey.