

GROWING BY LEAPS AND BONDS

Turn the calendar back to 1991. The future of Geneva was in doubt. The 1990 event never happened. The one-year hiatus was due to the many distractions in founder Adrian Skunza's life. He was tied up with family, work, and other matters very common with 40-year-old men. Believing the Geneva weekend was too good to erase, Frank Alexander grabbed the reigns of Commissioner and resurrected the outing before the warm coals burnt out.

Frank will be the first to tell you that Geneva saved itself. Until 1991, there was a steady group of 12 to 16 golfers who attended regularly. The voices of these guys shouted loud and clear, sort of a harmonizing chorus, singing the praises of Geneva. Adrian Skunza, Gary Glanzman, Vince Gatto, Fritz Ford, Jerry Graves, Jack Berger, Jim Nogawick, Dick Barrett, Bob and Don Rutherford, John Skunza, Shannon Boothe, Buck Luzader, and Frank Alexander sang the songs which sounded like swing and never the blues. One of the ears affected by this beat was Jay Green. Always a man searching for a new and exciting adventure, Jay was struck by the urge to become part of the fun. He heard Geneva was on again and declared his intention to attend. He was not coming alone. He brought an inkling of dance partners from the Sunday Tour and the Plank's Golf League. These fellows were the likes of Bob Elflein, Mike Weilbacher, Mel Voll, Joe Casa, Ralph DiCarolus, Gary Miller, Wally Maley, Pat Dorn, Donice Foreaker, and Welby. Jay was not finished recruiting. He dipped into the plumber's world. Bill Boggess, Keith Boggess, Mark Schmitt, and Scott Riffle became Geneva regulars. The field grew immediately to 28 players.

There was added significance to the plumber's addition. Billy and Keith were from the Ironton area. Until they entered the fold, Geneva was a fraternity of Southenders from Columbus, Ohio. The Boggess boys harmonized perfectly, adding a Kentucky twang to the choir much like Michael McDonald brought a unique sound to the Doobie Brothers. They opened the door for more outsiders to join in. The Southend bond is still strong but no longer exclusive. They come from the Columbus suburbs, Kentucky, Texas, Las Vegas, Florida, Cleveland, and Utah among other places.

Much has changed since 1991. The idea of playing a practice round on Friday was the brainchild of Gary Miller. Manakiki Golf Course became the venue for several years. Originally, this round was not part of the Geneva competition. A few years later, the round was switched to Hemlock Springs. While at Hemlock, Geneva grew into a three-day tournament. An influential John Skunza thought Hemlock was growing stale and bent the Commissioner's ear to change courses. Early in the new millennium, rotating Friday's tracks became a staple of the tournament.

Before the Gavin Cup came into existence, there was a mishmash of games played. Best Ball was always a mainstay, sometimes four-man teams others two-man teams. You could count on a Skins game every round. Something was missing, however. Dick Barrett is a mastermind of running games of chance. For several years he organized different competitive competitions. He spent many Geneva nights calculating winners and losers in a four-flight tournament play. He even instituted parimutuel betting for a few years. He was good with numbers. He crunched figures for the State of Ohio Taxation Dept. If it was not for his government benefits, I would lay odds Dick would have become a bookmaker.

Dick was relieved when Joe Casa masterminded his plan of building a trophy to be passed around to the winners of a three-day event. The first Gavin Cup was awarded in 2001. The initial winners were the team of Legend Gary Glanzman and Jeff Graessle who is still referred to as "The Ringer." It is only fitting that Gary won the original Gavin Cup competition which appeared as a stamp of approval by God. Another tradition came to be about the same time. The 9-hole Scramble gained instant Geneva ratification. Held after Saturday's round, it is the opportunity to play in a group who would not normally be part of your foursome. Many believe it is the most entertaining round of the weekend. Several factors contribute to this train of thought and many of them can be counted by the empty cans in the Geneva trash containers. The Scramble Committee deserves credit also for comprising balance teams every year.

The end of the ought decade of the 2000's saw bigger fields. Geneva became yearly stops for mainstays like

Dick Plageman, Ron Szymczak, Tom Jech, Don Jander, Mark Spangler, Bill Kirk, Tim Black, Gary and Matt Mazzocco, Mike Pagnanelli, as well as Chuck Rotter and Jim Centorbi from Cleveland. One trip to Geneva brings a desire to return. The Geneva reputation, and the phrase Geneva Worthy makes taking that first trip intimidating. How so? The Dick Plageman venture best describes it. "I thought Geneva was just Pera's, the golf course, and the Dairy Queen," Dick said. He was unaware of the Geneva Strip. Many of his friends complained about Pera's accommodations but they were always excited to return. Years of pressure from Jay finally came to fruition. Scared to come on his own, he swayed brothers Huck and Jim to accompany him. For a big, bad retired policeman, this sounds wimpy. I guess Geneva's intimidation factor is real. Before Dick made the trip, he was given four valuable pieces of information by Dick Barrett and Jack Berger. "No.1-Bring sandals to walk around the room," Dick quoted. "No.2-Bring extra towels. No.3-Advised to bring disinfectants and air fresheners. No.4-Don't expect to win money. Jack finished by saying if Frank walks toward you on Sunday, you were a winner." As fate would have it, Dick Plageman partnered with Pat Dorn to win the Gavin Cup in 2009, Dick's first year.

Geneva had not stopped growing. During the two thousand and teens, an influx of younger generations of golfers made their presence. Fathers brought their sons. I have already mentioned Gary and Matt Mazzocco. Others include Dick and Blaise Plageman, Pat and Shawn Dorn, Tim and Tom Black, Keith and Nick Boggess, Brian and Tim Hughes, Ray and Alex Ballard, Mark and Sam Kovachy, Rick and Zach Jonas. Then there is Dagon Abdon who reversed fields and dragged his dad, Todd, to Geneva. These millenniums invited their friends. By 2020, Geneva's field pressed 50 players. The year of the Coronavirus pandemic staged a roster of 44 players.

To think, that initial gathering of eight has become one of the most anticipated events of every year. So many wonderful personalities hold so many extravagant memories. America may be a melting pot but think of Geneva as stew. The meat is the cast of characters who set the tone during Adrian Skunza's reign. Jay and his troops could be considered the potatoes. The offspring and their friends are the vegetables. The Strip adds spice. The Geneva golf course is the broth. Slowly cooked for decades and

we have a tasty outing. Looking forward to many more Geneva Opens. There are more memories to be made. Whether we like it or not, history goes in only one direction.