

## A TRIBUTE TO AN INFLUENTIAL 3

### JOE B, WELBY, and G

So many traditions, so many highlights during a Geneva weekend. Each participant adds more nuggets with every act. This piece is about three men who played an important role in shaping Geneva, Joe Casa (aka Joe B), Mark Markovich (aka Welby), and Gary Miller (aka G). These men left their mark, introducing new concepts which have withstood time and we continue to practice today. Unfortunately, these men were taken from this world too early. They may be gone but I intend to be sure they are not forgotten.

If anyone exemplified Geneva's behavior, Welby would be the example. He could be the Geneva poster emblem for both its golf and late night partying. That skinny dude who could hide behind a telephone pole and not be spotted, pounded down spirits glass for glass with anyone. Puffing on cigarettes and blowing smoke like a steam engine, he left a dent in a bottle of 7 Crown at every bar on the strip. Seven and Sevens were his drink. Though he was not the first to portray a constant thirst for Geneva's nightlife, he may have been the best. Jay Green talking about Geneva once said, "Golf gets in the way of a good drunk." Not so with Welby. He returned to his room at 3 A.M. every morning after the saloon doors were locked, the chairs sat atop the tables, and alcohol was no longer served. The following morning you would find Welby at Mary's Kitchen soon after they opened, preparing to do it all over. Hungover like Dolly Parton's breasts, he would stumble to the first tee and still play "A" caliber golf. He was a man who consistently overcame "The Geneva Factor" and never complained no matter how bad his head hurt. Any animosity or frustration with any person, place, or thing remained bottled inside him. He never met a man or a liter of 7 Crown he didn't like. The young guns who follow in Welby's footsteps today, need to toast this man for creating this Geneva trail.

Geneva grew into a three day event because of the initiative of G. Just a year or two before the new millennium, G landed a job in the Cleveland area. During his short stint on the North Coast, the idea of golf on Geneva Eve ate away at him. Unfamiliar with Northeast Ohio courses, he contacted Joe B. Together they scoured the available venues and G made tee times at Manakiki. The success

of year 1 brought on a year 2, then 3, and 4. Friday's players grew with each year and soon nearly all of Geneva's field played. The growth occurred during the Tiger Woods phenome which peaked interest in golf. Manakiki made it difficult to secure so many tee times and the Commissioner grabbed the baton and raced to new horizons. Hemlock Springs in Geneva served as host for several years before the concept of rotating tracks began. Eventually, the official tournament expanded to three days. Personality wise, G was easy going and always enjoyable company. Little rattled him. Mike Weilbacher recalls and later verified by Jay Green, while returning home from Geneva one year, a group of motorcyclists weaved in and out of traffic like a swarm of bees causing a more erratic drive. G's bags were not so securely tied to the luggage rack. The strap gave way and G's clothes ended on the berm of I-90 West. Instead of retrieving his belongings, G laughed and said something about a homeless guy in Cleveland will be wearing his clothes. There was a sense of pride to help the poverty stricken.

Another tradition credited to G and his friend Joe B is the practice of giving away Geneva participating favors. They collaborated with Legend Fritz Ford and each year the Geneva field received a new golf towel. Their complimentary contributions were quality productions. Each version differed in color and design but never lacked style. After years of towels, the Merchandise Committee adopted an alternate plan and the towels have been replaced by diverse products, most recently yetis, coolers, lounge chairs and clubbrellas.

Joe B had one more Geneva dream. Influenced by Lord Stanley's Cup, he commissioned me to have such a trophy constructed to be passed each year to the winners of the three day event. Several hundreds of dollars invested from Joe B's pocket were donated for the project. The perception of a trophy capable of holding a fifth of tequila for the champions and their comrades to gargle in triumph could not quite be fulfilled. Still, the trophy stands proud and glorious like the Statue of Liberty and is an honorable representation for the fireplace mantel after a spectacular week at golf.

I tried naming the trophy the Joe B Cup but he would not have it. His success in business was evident among his colleagues but never towards his friends. At a Commissioner's Dinner when held at the Restaurant Lounge he ordered a round of Cuervo Gold for the table of 28. Embarrassed about the fact

he could not show his appreciation to his Geneva family when told they did not have 28 shot glasses. He calmly looked the manager in the eye and said "Get 'Em". As nice of a guy as Joe B was I believe he could have backed down Saddam Hussein. Just minutes later we toasted another successful Geneva trip with shots of Cuervo Gold. Despite all his success, he stayed close to his long time buddies and politely thanked us in his humble way whenever invited. An avid biker, Joe B would render his car keys to John Skunza after Sunday golf and bicycled 75 miles home.

These three remarkable men left behind a Geneva Legacy still cherished today. The first year after Welby's death the Geneva caps had an inscription which read "Play Like Welby". The champion's hats given to the Best Ball winners had inscribed "Played Like Welby". Those who knew these men miss them. The unfortunate who missed these men are now introduced. Anyway we look at it, Joe B, Welby, and G are still a part of Geneva.