



On The Earie

By Tom Powell, OABA News Ambassador

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Holy Cow! That was one of the favorite expressions of Harry Caray, the great broadcaster of the **St. Louis Cardinals** and **Chicago Cubs**, who would have celebrated his 99th birthday on March 4. The same exclamation applies to the fast starts enjoyed by the Feb. 28-March 10 **Florida Strawberry Festival**, Plant City, Fla., and Feb. 25-March 17

Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo.

After a great run for Frank Zaitshik's **Wade Shows** at the Florida State Fair, Tampa, this bodes well for the industry, which is just starting to kick into gear. The action never seems to stop at the clubrooms of the **International Independent Showmen's Association**, Gibsonton, where veteran concessionaire, Jeffery Richards, was installed as president on Feb. 12; and the Hit the Road Barbecue is scheduled for St. Patrick's Day, March 17, giving Irishmen like me two reasons, as if we needed any, to celebrate.

Jeffery's late father, Mike, was club president in 1978. Richards now has games in Michigan with **T. J. Schmidt Amusements**. In the past, he and his late mother, Judy, were on **Myers International Midways**.

I took my wife, Christine, to a great steakhouse called **Jimmy Kelly's** that has been in existence for 85 years, on her birthday March 2. It's as good or better a place as Ruth's Chris, Morton's or Don Shula's, and is locally owned. The father of Mike Kelly, who has run it for the last 34 years, was Bill Kelly, who had planned to own and operate a horse race track in partnership with **Johnny Hobbs** in Nashville until politicians voted them down a few years ago. Hobbs, who is now 91, was part of our party group Saturday and once we both arrived at our own homes later that evening, we found out we had taken each other's walker. There was a time when we partied hard, but we were both sober as a judge, honest.

I talked to Ronnie Netterfield who said everybody was doing great in Plant City, where Charles Panacek's **Belle City Amusements** has the midway. "Today is Parade Day," he said, on Monday. "It rained early, but the weather is beautiful now." I talked to Paul Davis (who has been fair manager for the last 11 years), and he said he was tired, but very happy since the crowds had been so great. A glitch occurred when Steven Tyler, who had been with Aerosmith, had to cancel his Sunday night performance because of throat problems. A local band substituted for a free show.

Ronnie, who has **Netterfield Floss Concessions** with his wife, Kim, and parents Butch and Ann, called me Thursday, opening day, after a morning show by Polka King Jimmy Sturr. Sturr, a native of Florida, N. Y., and a fellow graduate of mine from the Jesuit-run **University of Scranton**, was signing autographs when he took time to take the phone from Ronnie and talk to me. He wanted to know when he'd see me again and I told him to make sure he got some of that great Netterfield caramel corn.

Other acts who performed so far at Plant City include The Oak Ridge Boys, Alabama, Willie Nelson, The Brothers Osborne, Home Free, Kool and The Gang, and Chicks With Hits, including Terri Clark, Pam Tillis, and Suzy Bogguss. "It's Pat Boone this afternoon for his last show ever before retiring, and Martina McBride tonight," said Netterfield. Boone, 84, has announced he will retire after this show.

"All the acts have drawn well," said Netterfield. David Snowden's **Triangle Talent** booked the talent. David Starkey, who was president of the Gibtown Club in 1995, also said Plant City was off to a terrific start. He books during the season with **Arnold Amusements**, which has 16 rides booked with Belle

City. David and his wife, Dee Dee, who was Gibtown president in 2008, have their Helicopter and Strawberry rides booked in Plant City. T. J. Schmidt has three rides booked there.

By the way, the new third vice president of the Gibtown Club is Alan Safran of **Dean & Flynn Fiesta Shows**, Seabrook, New Hampshire. That show is owned by Gene Dean and his wife of 52 years, Mary, and their son, E. J., who was **OABA** chairman in 2017, and his wife, Norma. Safran, who now resides in Gibsonton, is shop foreman, after being a Unit Manager for 32 years with Fiesta.

E. J., Norma, and her father, William Silsby, also operate the famous **Cream Puff Bakery** at **The Big E** (Eastern States Exposition), West Springfield, Mass. That operation had been run by Ray, now 81, and Dolores Billie, 76, from 2004 through 2017. The Billies traveled for more than 50 years with Billie's Baked Potatoes.

I had called E. J. to congratulate his dad, a great **Notre Dame** and **Boston Red Sox** fan, on his upcoming induction into the **New England Association of Parks and Attractions Hall of Fame** on March 19. A Notre Dame graduate, Gene actually got his start at Salisbury Beach, Massachusetts, where the family owned 38 games and several rides at the seaside resort community.

I remember going there to visit and do stories on his operation and that of Roger Shaheen who owned **Shaheen's Fun-O-Rama**, when I was editor of **Amusement Business**. When I see Dean, who like me, is a big guy, who probably hasn't seen the inside of a gym since it was mandatory in high school, I recall when he and the late George (Bud) Gilmore of **Smokey's Greater Shows** would get together. One would laugh and say to the other, always in front of a big crowd, "Take a look at that guy. Can you imagine what his equipment looks like?" Each swore they were the first to come up with the line, but both took full advantage of it quite often.

I was the main speaker at that New England group's 91st conference and annual meeting when the late Alan Ramsay was president in 2004. One of the thrills was seeing Shaheen, who was elected to the Hall in 1998. I still have Ramsay's business card from when he was vice president of Attraction Operations for **Ripley Entertainment**. He had been with **Roger Williams Park Zoo** and **Carousel Village** for many years before taking the Believe It Or Not position. He picked me up at Logan International Airport in Boston in a limousine that was well stocked with alcoholic beverages. The short trip was enjoyable. When I talked to E. J., he was weathering a snowstorm while his parents were enjoying the sunshine in sunny Florida. "I run the winter quarters up here," he said, adding, "That's why we open so early."

I go into the hospital for pre-operation and other tests tomorrow, which are expected to last for most of the day. Hence, I'm writing this column on a Monday. I report for surgery at 6 a.m. on Friday. Regarding that, I received an e-mail from Lorelei Schoendienst of **Luehrs Ideal Rides**, which said, in part: "Hello, Tom. While I am concerned with your health, I can't help thinking that you probably have the best 'nurse' this side of Gibtown. On the other plus side, baseball is just beginning." She's right.

Blackhawk Bill Johnson of **A Fantasy Amusements** wrote, "I hope everything will be okay and Mary and I will have you in our prayers. I called you when we were heading home to try and meet up on the way. Sorry we couldn't connect. Colonel Parker was at my banquet (when he was installed as president of the Showmen's League of America), which Larry Davis sold me on. Jimmy Floyd was upset at me for sharing my big night. Get well! Say hi to Christine!" Will do on both counts.

Brad Schroder of **Schroder Concessions**, Faribault, Minn., wrote, "Just finished reading your column

in which you told of the challenges you are now facing, and I just wanted to reach out and say you are in my thoughts and prayers. I am confident of a positive outcome. Some years ago, Ron Hamm, who at that time was secretary of the **Midwest Showmen's Association**, had the same thing you are now facing. Surgery removed his, along with a chunk of his nose, which improved his looks in my opinion.

There is always a silver lining in any adversity. Best wishes!" I always kid that it would be hard to improve on my good looks, but that really is only joshing.

Have all great days, and God Bless!

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