



**On The Earie**  
**by Tom Powell, OABA News Ambassador**

**Wayne McCary**, former president of **The Eastern States Exposition** and the **Big E**, West Springfield, Mass., who was the first fair manager to become **OABA chairman**, in 2009, and his good friend, **Bob Commerford of Commerford and Sons Petting Zoo**, used to joke that they would see me in my office during the trade show in Gibsonton, Fla.

They, along with anybody else who had ever met me knew my office was just inside the side door of the **Cocanut Bar** in the clubrooms of the **International Independent Showmen's Association**. For most of the 46 years I have attended, **George (Bud) Gilmore**, owner of **Smokey's Greater Shows**, who died Nov. 5, 2013, would be on my immediate left. Further down were friends of Gilmore, including **Mike Lary**, **Ed LaGasse**, **George (A Winner Every Time) Mitford**, and **Ron Chesley** along with **Leah O'Neil**, **Terri Swika**, and **Joe Kennedy**. My pals from Nashville, **Johnny Hobbs**, **Eddie Bryan**, **Wayne (Trucker) Beck**, **Eddie Paschall**, **Bill Goodman**, **Paul Hatfield**, and **Jack Burns** reclined on the cushioned seats behind me. **Gene McQuater** of **McQuater's Greater Shows** and **Albert and Dennis Carollo** were always nearby. People would come and go as the drinks piled up, fun times. Across the bar was Big **Bill Harding**, who managed the **Yonkers Fair** in New York for the Rooney family that also owned the **Pittsburgh Steelers**. To his right was the Canada Corner, Sitting there were **John Robertson**, who took my picture every year, **John Homeniuk**, **Don Campbell** and his wife, **Scoop**, **Barry Jamieson**, **Tommy Collins**, **Rick LaWand**, **Sean Magill**, **Glenn Maxwell**, and occasionally, **Alfie Phillips**.

On one occasion, somebody noted that they saw **J. D. Floyd** and **Billy Baxter**, owners of **Cumberland Valley Shows**, and cracked they were the first show owners they had seen that day. "What am I, chopped liver?" Asked Gilmore, in disbelief. We, along with **Rene** and **Judy Piche**, matched each other drink for drink until he gave it up for the last few years he attended. I maintained the tradition, with the help of my wife, **Christine**, **Bill Lordy**, **Kathy Razzano**, **Gracie Yeager**, and others who came and went.

I can't tell you how many dozens of notebooks I've filled while working from that sometimes air-conditioned office, or how many thousands of pictures I took. Lordy and I would take 10 rolls of film, with 36 shots on each, to a nearby drug store, have the pictures printed and then I'd pick up out enough for Jackpots and other pages of the paper, and over-night them back to Nashville.

I would always do a story on Smokey's and I'd inevitably get around to asking Bud what he purchased while leaving the bar and making his rounds of the trade show. He'd smile and tell he bought a couple of brooms. I miss Bud and was honored to speak at his eulogy in Gibtown.

Christine and I had I had a special treat during the Christmas season, as **Bud's wife, Jeanette**, who now runs the carnival, was in town for a visit. We got together at **John A's Bar and Restaurant**, owned by my friend of 61 years, **Johnny Hobbs**. With Gilmore were **Greg** and **Tammy Ruda**, with their son, **Spencer**. We had a great time, mostly reminiscing about Bud, like the time I was at his home for a

Super Bowl party and guests were preparing to depart. As my eyes were glued to the television set, he muttered, "Biggest fair in Maine, getting ready to leave," which was my cue to make sure I took their picture with him before they left.

We laughed about a trip we all took with **Duke Smith** and **the Piches** to places such as China and Viet Nam, where girls giggled at me and Bud, saying we looked like two Buddhas. Christine reminded Jeanette that she immediately intervened and said, "He's my Buddha."

The Rudas have been games concessionaires on Smokey's for the 36 years Jeanette and Bud were together, and before. Greg's dad, **Ernie Ruda**, was a well-known balloon peddler, who worked the parade routes, **Super Bowls**, the various **Mardi Gras** celebrations, and other events of that ilk. I was reminded that I had taken a picture of Spencer that appeared in **AB** when he was a baby. Besides working most of the dates with Smokey's, Greg is also a representative for **Rhode Island Novelty**, and Tammy is into real estate. I asked Jeanette about **Kenny Smith** who used to have a big barbecue stand with the show and found out he had to leave because other concessionaires complained about all the smoke his joint put out. This Kenny also worked for **Anchor Tent and Awning**. He's not the **Kenny Smith** whom we all know who owns **Rocken Graphics**. Jeanette said this Kenny has done work for the show and always does a good job. **Rob Driskill** has been general manager of Smokey's for the last several years, and she admits she couldn't do it on her own. She has also used **H-2B Visa** workers for the last 16 years, 55 of them last year, and hopes she'll be able to get them again.

She said last season was wet and hot. Food sales were way down because of that, but rides held their own. The show travels with between 35 and 40 rides, and five or six food stands, depending on the event, the same with games, although she said there are about 100 vendors as the show's closing date in October, the **Fryeburg Fair**. All dates are in Maine and the season opens the end of May. Driskill, whose father, **Bob**, owned **McDermott Amusements of Chicago**, has been invaluable. "I couldn't do it on my own and I've tried with others, but he's the best." The **Thunderbolt** and **Tilt** were completely refurbished last year, and a **Trabant** and **Spider** were added. She said she hasn't bought new brooms!

The route will remain the same in 2019, except Smokey's will be able to work with **Gene Dean's Dean and Flynn's Fiesta Shows** at the **Bangor Fair**. That was impossible the last few years because of a conflict with the **Presque Isle Fair**, "but they've agreed to change their dates for us. We have worked with Gene at **Skowhegan Fair** in the past, and will again," said Jeanette.

**Art Gillette** and his mother, **Betty**, book with Smokey's at Fryeburg when the dates don't conflict with those of Center Sandwich, N. H.

Looking ahead, Jeanette said, "at first, I had hoped somebody would buy me out, but nobody has the money. The economy is good, though Maine has always been tough. Everything depends on weather."

In a recent column where I wrote about the passing of **Claire Morton**, who owned Golden Wheel Amusements of Alaska, I recalled her bringing salmon, caribou and all other kinds of food to an **OABA** meeting in Nashville. **Jean Clair** of **Luehrs Ideal Rides**, who was **Chair of OABA in 1996**, sent an e-mail saying: "It was for my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday! Duh. My name was in lights (at Johnny Hobbs's Nashville Palace) and Claire brought goodies from Alaska. Not so long ago! She was the true pioneer.

"She wrote the ride laws and workers comp in Alaska. **Golden Wheel** was IT! And so was she. She is responsible for so many beautiful memories of **SLA**, including my Breakfast at Tiffany, And the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. What a queen! Hugs!" Jean, was the first female chair of **OABA**. By the way, the laconic **Alfie Phillips**, retired **Conklin Shows** executive, responded to that column by saying, "Hi Tom, sorry

to hear about Claire Morton. She was a special lady. Thanks for the ink. Keep it flowing.”

**Steve (Shotgun Red) Hall**, who helped me emcee an AB party in which **Garth Brooks** performed, died at the age of 64 over the holidays. While in Brainerd, Minn., where he was from, he suffered a heart attack. I saw him at **Hobbs's Christmas party**, and he thanked me for mentioning him in a recent column. I had noted that **Johnny Holmes**, former manager of the **Arkansas State Fair**, Little Rock, was so impressed, he booked him for all 10 days of his fair. Hall was a very funny guy, a great entertainer.

God bless everyone in 2019!

**Please send news to [tomp@oaba.org](mailto:tomp@oaba.org), or call 615 319-1258.**

Have all great days, and God Bless!