

Mike Homza Tribute

It's pretty much a certainty that people have traditions that they celebrate in most homes, especially around the Christmas holiday season. One tradition that I inherited was to put up the outdoor decorations the Saturday after Thanksgiving and to take them down on January 6, the feast of the Epiphany. One new trivial one for me was to keep an eye on the mail to see who was the first to send a Christmas card and who would be the last.

I mainly looked forward to receiving the distinctive card from PWWTU past President Mike Homza. The envelope was always adorned with several postage stamps of different shapes and sizes that added up to the first-class mail's going rate. They usually provided a history or art lesson that forced the curious mind to do a Google search on the topic.

For some reason that only Mike knew, he either harbored a distrust of the Forever stamp or was clearing out the duplicates in a stamp collection. He never left me with the impression that he was a philatelist.

My relationship with Mike Homza didn't start with his involvement with PWWTU. We attended South Allegheny High School at the same time.

The relationship would begin to develop at the Fly Tyers Vice shop, where Mike became one of the many sidekicks of Tony Marasco that passed through there over the years. When I visited the shop, it was to huck ads for Hatches and Rises when I was the editor. Mike would pass on like all of us do everything you wanted to know about fly fishing but did not ask.

On one occasion that I did not witness, he pissed off my good friend Jim Hostal to the point of striking blows.

Jim had just purchased a new rod, reel, and expensive fly line that he wanted to show to Tony. So out the three of them went for the test drive. On the backyard lawn where legendary caster Lefty Kreh once threw a fly line across the yard without using a rod, Mike tangled Jim's new fly line into the high tension electrical lines across the road with his back cast. The high tension in that yard surpassed any in that electrical conduit that day.

Mike was an active member in PWWTU, first serving as a member, then Vice President, and later Chapter President.

He always put the best interest of the Chapter first. One of his efforts was to negotiate a discount for PWWTU members with a big box outdoor store. Mike clearly worked for the benefit of the membership.

One of the funniest Cabin Fever events in Chapter History happened on his watch.

Chapter Member Mike Weithorn volunteered to lead the organizing committee for Cabin Fever that year. He did not disappoint when he brought in three fly fishing's heaviest hitters in Jack Dennis, Mike Lawson, and the legendary Gary LaFontaine as keynotes. The ballroom would take up two-thirds of the space for the evening's banquet. The hotel previously booked the remaining one-third for a wedding reception.

The Cabin Fever Expo came off without a hitch, but the banquet took a different turn. After the foodservice and speaker's programs commenced, all hell broke loose at the wedding next door. The music and the din were so loud that the banquet audience couldn't hear our speakers. We had a hard time even calling out the winning raffle ticket numbers. During the confusion, Mike Wiethorn disappeared. When asked where he was, in my frustration, I disclosed in a derogatory way the location of a contentious meeting with the hotel event coordinator. Minutes later, a lady approached the podium to inform me that my comment went out over the airways for everyone in the room to hear. In the confusion of the moment caused by being pulled in 20 different directions, I failed to realize that Jack Dennis had hooked me up with a wireless mike. Through Mike Wiethorn's efforts, he convinced the hotel owner to comp the room. When he tried to have the banquet included, Chapter President Homza explained that getting the room for free was enough and cautioned him not to push further. That was sage counsel, likely preventing bodily harm to Wiethorn.

Our card finally appeared on Christmas Eve, the envelope dressed with three stamps. One depicted mathematician and engineer Charles Steinmetz, another feting architecture, and the third Inventor extraordinaire, Nikola Tesla. (Yes, I Googled Steinmetz) Inside the Christmas card was a neatly folded note that opened with an apology for its presence in a Christmas Greeting. The note from Mike's beloved wife Mary informed us that on February 7, 2020, he unexpectedly went into cardiac arrest. Sadly after a nearly month-long courageous battle, he passed on February 24, 2020.

Mike was an organ and tissue donor - in passing as in life, he reached out to help others.

No doubt Mike will always remain in my thoughts at Christmas time. Not just for his unique Christmas Greeting with the personalized note in his distinctive handwriting but for the time he guided the Chapter as president with his steady hand on the tiller.