

# Everybody knew your name at this tavern

If you ever watched "Cheers" on TV (and who hasn't?), you would get an idea of what McTaggart's was like a couple of decades ago.

The site is occupied by a drug store now, but McTaggart's once stood at the corner of Mentor Avenue and Palmer Drive in Painesville Town-



**Jim  
Collins**

Editor's Notebook

s h i p  
a c r o s s  
from the  
shopping  
center.

J e r r y  
M c T a g -  
g a r t , w h o  
is now in  
" H o g  
Heaven,"

w a s t h e  
p r o p r i e t o r .

He was an interesting guy. I use the term "Hog Heaven" affectionately. Jerry handed out gold-colored hog lapel buttons to his patrons. The earlier versions were purple. They are hard to come by these days.

Piglets and hogburgers were staples on his menu.

There was no pretense about the bar. It was a place where friends gathered. Just as on the TV show, everyone knew your name.

The bartenders were celebrities in their own way. They were popular guys – and one gal – who tooted a horn and dropped the money into a spittoon every time a customer left a tip.

Most such gathering places have regular customers. There was never one more regular at McTaggart's than the late Bob Wormald. Bob was an insurance adjuster. He sat in the same seat every night at the curve in the bar near the Mentor Avenue end.

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McTaggart's closed only two days a year. I believe they were Easter and Labor Day. As you can see, Bob was there 363 days a year.

His consecutive streak was broken by an event in Kalamazoo, Mich. Tex Beneke may have had a gal in Kalamazoo, but the city had a tornado several years ago, and Bob was dispatched to assess the damage.

When he returned, he began a new streak at McTaggart's.

Back in the 1970s and '80s, Cleveland Browns' home games were seldom on TV because of the blackout rule, but away games were always on television.

So for Sunday Browns' TV games, one of the McTaggart regulars would host the game at his or her home and all the regulars would be there.

Some of them were acquainted with celebrities

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# Notebook

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and brought them along to the televised games. I remember a game when the Browns great former guard Gene Hickerson was at one.

And Boog Powell, the Orioles first baseman who played briefly with the Indians, also came to one.

Among the legendary bartenders were Rusty Hoffman, Sam Waterwash, Tom Straley, Sue Compola, Tim Cavanaugh, Joe Davis and Frank Parinacci.

Frank Powers, a regular bartender at Hellriegel's Inn who never worked at McTaggart's, helped out at a McTaggart's reunion a few Saturdays ago at Hellriegel's. He worked alongside Rusty, Tom and Sue.

As do all good bartenders, they had loyal followings.

The reunion was celebrated so former McTaggart's patrons could get together and tell tales of "the old days" while enjoying an adult beverage.

It was also a fundraiser for "Relay for Life," raising more than \$3,000 for the American Cancer Society.

Hellriegel's is just west of Jerry's former digs on Mentor Avenue, and the reunion was an outpouring of old friends, curiosity seekers, long-lost habitués of the watering hole and others who wandered in wondering what was going on.

Advance stories in the paper announced that the event was sponsored by the Painesville Rotary Club, and indeed I did spot a few Rotarians among the hundreds of guests who brought a warm smile to the faces of proprietors Syl Trifoletti and Al Diorio.

One of those I saw selling chances in a 50-50 raffle was Dr. Les West, a Painesville optometrist and Rotarian.

A multitude of conversations drifted throughout the packed room, including recollections of memorable events at McTaggart's and lamentations that the saloon is no longer extant.

A featured guest was big, and I mean *really* big, Len Barker, the former Indians pitcher and author of one of those rare perfect games 25 years ago.

Yes, Len retired all 27 batters who faced

him without allowing a baserunner in a 3-0 victory over Toronto. The game was played in the old Cleveland Municipal Stadium.

Len may be a celebrity of great magnitude, but he is a down-to-earth guy and never too busy to sign an autograph or talk baseball.

Al Jacobs sat in the Bank One loge for that perfect game. He brought along his ticket stubs for the perfect pitcher to sign.

Len willingly obliged.

I have a couple of ticket stubs of which I am proud, and I once sent them to an Indians game with our writer Jim Ingraham for Carlos Baerga to sign. He did so, and of course I still have them.

They were from the fabled game in which Baerga hit two home runs in the same inning, one batting left-handed and one right-handed.

It happened the last season that the Tribe played on the lakefront, in 1993.

For many years, Baerga was the only player ever to accomplish that feat, but it has since been duplicated by a player for the Chicago Cubs.

Even though Baerga's feat is no longer unique, it remains memorable.

But I digress.

I sat next to Len at the reunion while he demolished a huge steak and mounds of french fries and onion rings. A man's got to keep his strength up, you know.

"I'll bet a million fans have told you they were at the stadium that night," I said to the giant-sized right hander.

"No," he replied, "only a couple hundred thousand."

Actually there was sparse attendance that night because it was early in the season and Mundy Stadium could be cold and foreboding, not to mention spooky, on those bone-chilling nights.

"Well, I saw almost every pitch," I told him — truthfully.

But I wasn't at the ballpark. I watched the game on TV at — of all places — McTaggart's.

Most of the patrons paid only scant attention to the game, watching it from time to time and then returning to their conversations.

Until about the sixth inning.

Then word got around that none of the Blue Jays had reached base.

From that point on, attention was riveted on the screen. McTaggart's was not what you would call a sports bar, but for about three innings that night it became one.

Regulars who almost always sat on the large, flat juke box got up and faced the TV. Everyone else faced the tube.

The bartenders worked quickly to keep up with orders for beer (not many fancy drinks were sold at McTaggart's) because they, too, wanted to watch history in the making.

When center fielder Rick Manning raced in to catch the fly ball for the final out to preserve the perfect game, he began jumping wildly in the air. The roar of the crowd at the bar probably duplicated the turmoil at every other establishment in the Greater Cleveland area where baseball fans stood with their fingers crossed and hollered for the success that Barker achieved.

It was fun talking with Lennie about that.

He is also a regular at Captains' games in Eastlake (he lives in the area and has a carpentry and remodeling business called Perfect Pitch Construction. It's in the Lake County phone book.)

He is a big fan of Classic Park and of the Captains. He remembers what it was like to be a minor leaguer trying to work his way up to the majors.

And if you ask him, he'll tell you Classic Park is one of the classiest baseball parks in all the country — a real treasure that has helped transform Vine Street from a one-time eyesore into a beautiful stretch of real estate.

I gave Lennie a gold star for cleaning his plate that evening. Yet every time someone stopped by seeking an autograph, he put down his knife and fork and obliged with a smile and a few kind words.

He had a long conversation with Painesville Mundy Judge Mike Cicconetti. They seemed to be old friends.

A topic of conversation at the reunion for Peggy Taylor Grant, a victim's advocate in the justice system, and Painesville City Council Member Abby DelaMotte, wasn't McTaggart's or baseball, however.

It was "24," about which I have written previously. After what Peggy told me about the TV thriller and humor columnist Dave Barry, I figure it's worth a few more observations next Sunday.

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