

BOB BYELICK, HERO AMONG US

By Al Karnavicius

It was not too long after I met Bob Byelick at my first Kiwanis Club meeting in the mid-1990s that he and another new Kiwanis friend, Jim Fischer, invited me to play golf with them on a Saturday morning. Jim was a pretty good golfer, Bob was better, and I was (and still am) a hacker. No matter...they were patient, encouraging and two of the best sports I've ever met. It was the beginning of an enduring friendship that continues today, even with Jim's passing 9 years ago. Over those years I have watched, worked with and learned from Bob Byelick not only what it means to be a good friend, but what it takes to be a Hero Among Us.

Born and raised in Tarrytown, NY, Bob did his undergraduate work at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, PA majoring in History and Spanish with a minor in Baseball. In 1973, he arrived in St. Petersburg to attend Stetson University College of Law and received his J.D. in 1976. He soon discovered that with the combination of Spring Training baseball, year-round sunshine and a more relaxed work environment, there was no way he was ever going back to New York.

Bob was hired by the Bradham, Lyle, Skipper and Cramer firm and began his career in Workers' Compensation law. In 1991, he left Lyle and Skipper to become a partner with David Abbey and Jeff Adams in what is today Abbey, Adams, Byelick & Mueller, LLP. He became certified in Workers' Compensation in 1993 and holds an AV® rating with Martindale-Hubbell. Since 2007, he has been listed in Florida Super Lawyers.

He has served 2 terms as treasurer of the St. Petersburg Bar Association and has chaired several committees over the years. It is his continuing civic involvement in the community, however, that takes much of his non-legal time.

Bob started with the Sunshine City Jaycees in 1977. This group of young professionals included many future leaders in St. Petersburg including Rick Baker and Bill Foster. He served as President in 1980 and was instrumental in the establishment of the Children's Dream Fund, thanks to the efforts of the Board and Scott Simmons. Then, in 1980,



St. Pete Bar Foundation President, Erin Barnett, Judge Shames and Bob Byelick

Bob's father-in-law, Dan Barcus, invited him to join the Kiwanis Club of St. Petersburg. No surprise - he served as president in 1987-88. During the 1980s he was also involved, for several years, in the United Way Allocations Committee.

In the mid-1980s, his love of baseball led him to the St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce Baseball Committee where he became involved in the effort to secure a major league franchise. Bob and many others worked on numerous projects, events, trips and lobbying campaigns. He chaired the Baseball Committee for 2 years, formed a Sports Council, and served on the Chamber Board of Directors. Well aware that "Baseball is always watching" Bob encouraged others involved to excel in all baseball-related activities. Those early efforts paid off and Tampa Bay baseball fans have enjoyed attending Rays games since 1998.

In the 1990s, Bob became involved with the Suncoasters, serving 2 terms as treasurer in addition to selling beer at parades and staffing the Harvey's 5K. In the following decade Bob joined the Board of PARC where he served as Chairman in 2008-09. His work there helped to transform that Board into one of the most active in the area. After a mandatory year's absence, he returned to the Board in 2011. To quote Bob: "Life's problems melt away

BOB BYELICK, HERO AMONG US (CONTINUED)

when you see the accomplishments and happiness of PARC's clients on a regular basis."

In 2004 the St. Petersburg Kiwanis Club formed the Jim Fischer Scholarship Fund Committee in honor and memory of their fellow member. You may remember that Jim Fisher was an honoree at the first Heroes Among Us event. Jim's family and friends partnered with the Pinellas Education Foundation and the St. Petersburg Mayors, Mentors and More Doorways Scholarship Program to provide free college tuition to disadvantaged students in grades 6-11.

It should be a surprise to no one that Bob Byelick has been the chairman of this Committee since day one – he and Jim were very close. In 2008, fellow committee member and friend Skip Carr passed away, and the committee was re-named the Fischer-Carr Scholarship Fund Committee. The Committee holds an annual Birthday Bash to raise money for the Doorways Scholarships, and it continues to provide life-changing college education to those students who merit and need it the most. Now in its 9th year, the Fund has provided 197 scholarships. I know that Bob is most proud of what he and the friends of Jim and Skip have been able to accomplish in just a few years.

Bob became active with the business of baseball once again with the formation of the Clutch Hitters of Tampa Bay. It's a group of business people working as a liaison between the Rays and the Tampa Bay business community. He currently chairs this organization as it works towards making this team as successful as possible as a business. He is proud of this group's success in promoting dialogue among various leaders and entities about a new stadium – a dialogue that did not exist as little as 2 years ago.

So, besides practicing law and being a civic and community leader, what else does Bob do? During baseball season, you can (usually) see him at a Rays game, 2 rows above the visiting team's dugout. On Wednesday nights, you'll still find him at Woodlawn Park playing softball with the team Doug Williamson started in 1977. It was Williamson and softball that led Bob to meet his future wife Barbara after a game in April, 1978 at a well-known St. Petersburg landmark, The Club 28. Bob and Barbara's fortunate meeting ultimately resulted in a family, including a wonderful daughter,

Corrie Stover, grandchildren Jack 13, and Baylie 9, and a great son-in-law Bill. Living only 4 blocks away from their Snell Isle home, Barbara and Bob spend lots of quality time with them.

Besides being an avid reader, Bob also frequents St. Petersburg Country Club in the never-ending quest to be a better golfer (he's still much, much better than me). And, finally, after 44 years of playing, Bob registered his first hole-in-one on June 18, 2012. But it wasn't in St. Petersburg, or in Florida, or even in the United States. Bob got his hole in one in the place where golf was born: On hole #11 at St. Andrews Old Course in Scotland. Bob's a patient guy, and I know that he still is waiting to get one in this country. And I'm sure he will. I can't think of anyone who deserves it more.

Al Karnavicius has been president of Bayprint, a St. Petersburg Printing and Marketing Services Company, since 1982. He also has been serving as Honorary Consul to the Republic of Lithuania since 1999.

