

Bowling's Funniest Man: Walt Steinsiek

EDITOR'S NOTE: In the April issue of Stars & Strikes, America's Bowling Newsmagazine, publisher Jim Goodwin used his column to write about a friend to many in the bowling industry, NCAUSBCA Hall of Famer Walt Steinsiek, whose cartoons have appeared in numerous bowling publications around the world, including BOWL Magazine for close to 40 years. Here's a chance for those who have enjoyed his side-splitting humor to learn more about the man.

This will only be a humble column, but we could write a book about our dear friend, Walter Steinsiek. He is perhaps the kindest, most unique, and funniest person we have ever known. He is also, without question, "The World's Greatest Bowling Cartoonist," as he likes to bill himself tongue-in-cheek to the thousands who

have seen his bowling cartoons and cartoon books.

Walt is also one of the most interesting people on the planet—or at least you get that impression when listening to his life stories. A proud member of the "greatest generation," Walt served as a Merchant Marine in World War II, and it was during those years he began to "dabble" in cartooning to pass the time on the tankers and liberty ships where he was assigned.

After the war, he lived in New York City and became an active member of the Artist and Writers Club of the Seamen's Church, which led to a scholarship to the NYU School of Art in 1946. Walt eventually settled in Laurel, Md., but he never lost his affection and ties to his birthplace of Passaic, New Jersey. It was there that he discovered his lifelong love for the game

of bowling. He became a pinboy at age 12, and hanging out in those sometimes unsavory places made him a tough guy, and his other sports love became boxing.

Today, if you visited his home and studio in Micco, Florida, you would never suspect that this jovial gentleman was once a rough-and-tumble fighter who joined the service not only to serve his country but to stay out of trouble in his rough New Jersey neighborhood. And he served proudly.

In addition to a sister who lives in New Jersey, he had an older brother who was killed in the war and is buried in the Netherlands. Walt has long vowed to visit the grave, and in late May, he is scheduled to leave this country to do just that. At the gravesite, he plans to read aloud the last overseas letter his mother wrote that arrived too late.

Today, Walt shares his days with his wife, Jane. Married for more than 50 years, they have a daughter, Denise. When Walt is not busy writing his bowling column for four Florida newspapers or cartooning, he is very active in his church, where he recently became a Stephens minister.

When he resided in Laurel, Walt became a successful sign painter in the days when it took real artistic talent to produce signs and banners, and he started a bowling paper like the one you are reading now. His *Baltimore-Washington Bowling News* thrived for a dozen years before he sold it and retired to Florida.

In 1973, Walt produced his first bowling cartoon book. In those days, there was a popular cliché to describe people with moxie. It simply went, "He has balls!" And Walt certainly did, so he named his first book, *Balls!*, with the subtitle, *Bowling ... of course!* It was not only outrageous, it was outrageously funny.

Now 83, Walt has never stopped entertaining us with his stories and making us laugh out loud with his jokes and cartoons. To say he is a "prolific writer and cartoonist" is like saying there is a lot of sand on all the beaches in the world. Today, we have a whole library of Steinsiek cartoon books, including the series of "Approach" tomes entitled *Funny, Funnier*, and *Funniest Approach*, not to mention the various cartoon pamphlets and published cartoons in dozens of bowling newspapers and magazines.

A former president of the Bowling Writers Association of America and charter lifetime member of the Southern Bowling Writers Association, Walt has won nu-



At the 2006 International Bowl Expo in Las Vegas, Walt Steinsiek was the surprise recipient of the Sam Levine Flowers for the Living Award.

The legendary cartoonist occasionally is asked to prepare the cover for an awards program. Walt appears with a man he has caricaturized several times, PBA and USBC Hall of Famer Mike Aulby.



merous awards and is enshrined in three Halls of Fame, but two honors set him apart from the ordinary.

The first is that he is a recipient of the Sam Levine Flowers for the Living Award, which is sponsored by the Bowling Foundation, which is a part of the new International Bowling Campus.

The other is perhaps the greatest tribute. The BWAA Cartoonist of the Year Award is now officially named the "Steinsiek Award" after the "world's greatest bowling cartoonist." It will be a fitting legacy to his wonderful work.

The late Joe Lyou, who also was a "Flowers" winner, was fond of billing himself as the "Greatest Korean Bowling Writer," and then he would finish the joke by saying he was the *only* Korean bowling writer. Well, Walt is not the only bowling cartoonist, but he is certainly at the top of the list, and deservedly so, based on the thousands of cartoons he has lovingly drawn in his lifetime.

The Flowers Award started in 1960, and is given annually to people in the bowling industry who might go unnoticed for more traditional honors. It is special because only the panel of a dozen industry veterans can nominate the candidates and vote for the winner. There is no campaigning, no politics, no prejudice involved. In fact, the candidates are not aware they are on the ballot until the time of the presentation.

The award consists of two plaques and a beautiful bouquet of flowers. On one plaque is the Flowers poem, penned in

1960 by charter committee member Fritz Howell, and on the other a description of the award written by another of the founders, Sam Weinstein. It reads, *Not necessarily for any outstanding deed or spectacular accomplishment, but just for being a person in our world whom we love and admire for what you have done and stood for.*

Walt Steinsiek is such a person, and this column is my personal "flowers" award to him for being such a great friend to me

and so many others for so many years. He is a mentor, a hero, an incredible human being, and bowling is richer because of his contributions. I hope he keeps entertaining us for many more years.

Thanks for making us laugh, Walt.

Award-winning writer Jim Goodwin of Rockwall, Tex., is vice president of the Bowling Writers Association of America. Information about Stars & Strikes can be found at starsandstrikesbowling.com.

