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## Spare Change

By Johnny Campos

# Bowling family says goodbye to Ray Bart

The fundraiser at Striketown Bowl in Pekin last Saturday night was supposed to help Ray Bart and his family with medical bills and to help pay for the cost of Hospice care. The plan was for Bart himself to be there to see some of his long-time bowling friends.

It turned out to be a celebration of his life. Bart died at the age of 60 on August 22 at his home, surrounded by his family.

A full house turned out for the event, which included a 9-pin bowling tournament, raffles, a 50/50 drawing and other various ways to add to the total.

Bart, who was inducted into the Peoria bowling association's Hall of Fame in 2012, had been bed-ridden for the past couple of months after a second bout with cancer.

His first happened in 2013, when doctors discovered cancer on his nose.

"Then after six weeks of radiation, it was gone and he was good," said Tammy Bart, Ray's wife of 40 years.

The second occurred in 2021 after a trip to Vegas for the USBC Open Championships.

"When we got back from that trip, he had a doctor's appointment. He found a spot that they had to follow up on," Tammy said. "When he got the initial diagnoses, it was in his lymph nodes and his bones. It had spread everywhere. They gave him six to 12 months. He made it through that. Then he had a large tumor in his brain, and they had to go in for radiation. He made it through that. They did a scan and they said he had leptomeningeal disease, which is cancer of the lining of the brain. They gave him two to five months. That was last November."

Bob Baker came up with the idea of the fundraiser to help the Bart family because of a connection with Ray's daughter, Sarah Johnson.

"My wife Amanda gets her hair cut by Sarah," he said. "They talked about Ray quite a bit and how he kind of ran out of Hospice because his insurance would only pay so much. So that's how we got the ball rolling.

"I talked to the Bart family and talked to Sarah to see if it was something they'd be interested in doing. And they were. Jake Fletcher (Striketown proprietor) gave me a good deal on the bowling, and we could do anything else that we wanted to do. The reason we wanted it at Striketown is because it's the closest to Ray's house. The plan was for him to come here. This is the last place where he bowled league."

And Bart could bowl.

At his prime, he was a strapping 230-pound left-hander who could talk smack with the best of them – and back it up on the lanes.

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He rolled many honor scores, was on a couple of winning teams in the traveling Masters League, and even won a few city tournament titles.

Bart teamed with fellow left-hander Gary Strait to win the city doubles title in the 1997-98 season with a 1,358.

"I remember I wasn't bowling very well that day, and bowled awful in singles," Strait said. "Then Ray told me if I shot 600, he'd shoot 800 and we'd win. We were bowling with Pete Argo and his partner on the same lanes, and they ended up finishing second. I didn't even break 600, but Ray shot like 771 and we won.

"We also won a Masters League together one year. It was me, Ray, Mike McBride, and Ted Daniels. We kicked some butt that year!"

When I was talking to Ray's brother-in-law Mark Egan, he reminded me that I also had a connection with Bart on the lanes.

Bart's team needed a sub in the DuPont League at Bowl-Mor, and Terry Hoesly suggested that he call me. I was still working for the PBA Tour at the time but was home for the Christmas break.

The second week I subbed on the team, I shot my first 300 in Peoria.

Ironically, my son Andre also has a connection from back in 2013 at Linn Lanes in Canton.

"I shot my first 800 series against him in the Masters," said Andre, who was 19 at the time. "And I didn't even sweep him! He beat me the second game, 279-256. He was tough!"

After Ray died, there was talk that the fundraiser might be canceled. But Sarah Johnson wanted it to go on.

"Sarah is the one who told Ray that they were putting it together," Tammy Bart said. "He was so happy and touched. He has supported benefits of other people over the years. He was very honored."

Baker was hoping the fundraiser would raise about \$3,000. He was way short. The final tally was \$6,500.

As a tribute to the Hall of Famer, all current members of the area Hall of Fames were asked to throw the ceremonial first ball prior to the nine-pin event. Strait said he would do it if Ray's sons, Chris and Bryan, would join them, which they did.

"And they all threw it left-handed," said Tammy. "It was amazing to watch! I cannot tell you how amazing the bowling community truly is."

The sad thing about it is that Ray Bart wasn't around to see it in person.

"I honestly feel that he fought until he was ready to give me a break from caring for him," Tammy said. "I'm not ashamed to admit it, he put me on a pedestal. At the end he was completely dependent on me.

"But he told me never to say that cancer beat him. He fought until the end. He was very honored about this fundraiser, and he is smiling so big up in heaven right now. I guarantee it!"

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