

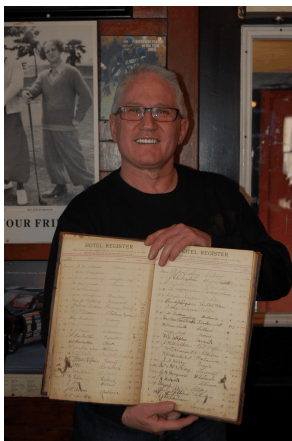


## We're in Business for the long haul - and the winner is:

Kelly's Homelike Inn, this well established Cobourg Sport's bar has a long and interesting history, not withstanding that it has been run for four generations. Situated on Third St. It is open from breakfast time to the last legal minute for the consumption of alcohol, and a good time has been had by

all who entered its hallowed doors.

Business Times sat down with the present owner, Gord Kelly (3<sup>rd</sup>) and listened avidly to the history of the place and its connections to local sports team for nearly a hundred years. To make the history confusing there has never been an owner of Kelly's that has not been called Gord, or Gordon. Luckily for oldtimers the present owner - Gord, had a father (Gord) but who was always known as Bus. Gord explained he never knew why Bus but family lore relates that as a child his father was called Buster, hence the short form Bus. Bus's father - Gord's grandfather was Gord!



**Gord Kelly (III), the present owner holding the historic hotel register**

Gord - the first, purchased the building and the business, it was then a Tavern and a Rooming House, in 1932. The building was built in 1845 and was always a Tavern or rooming house. Gord (III) proudly shows Business Times a relic from the past, "This was found in my Mum's basement and shows the registration details for the hotel from 1924." This book is now enshrined in a trophy case on the wall, surrounded by hundreds of framed team photos.

Bus Kelly (Gord II) assumed ownership of the business many years after working with his father and saw most of the changes that went with the 'drinking business' through the past few decades. For instance he was in the middle of the biggest local story of the 70s - the decision to change from a Men's only bar to a place where women would feel welcome. Prior to 1974 women only came into Kelly's on Halloween as part of the festivities. Women had been banned from the place since the Second

World War as Bus noted the fact that some women, who had husbands serving overseas, were drinking and sometimes carousing - it offended him, so he stopped it in his place, and the place became "men only". However amid the social change that came in the sixties and seventies one woman started a movement to bring women into the all male bastion. After resisting the effort, because he was following the wishes of his customers, Bus relented and women have been adding a new dimension to the place ever since.

One thing that has remained a constant since the early days has been the avid support of many local sports teams and causes. There hasn't been a successful Cobourg team, in most sports, that hasn't had the name Kelly's associated with it. "We have supported all kinds of teams." Gord (III) says with pride, "Hockey - a sweater in the Cougars team, a rugby team, a volleyball team, darts and bowling, fastball and softball - you name it and we have sponsored it. Heck Dad even sponsored a boxer at one time!" Asked about the most memorable team he sponsored, this family guy came back to his roots. "The most memorable time was when we sponsored the Hardball teams that his son played on and ran, we came close to an Ontario Championship one year." If he's interested in a team he will sponsor it.

Always a traditional place Kelly's only served beer until 1976. Gord (III) explained there was a practical reason for this. "Dad, only had himself and one other to run the place and he used to fill up a large tray of beer glasses and then serve customers as he moved around the room. No time to take orders and return with them!" Always the practical guy Bus watched his clientele drink beer up until the latter half of the night and then they would drift up the street to the Plaza or the British Hotels to drink liquor. He applied, successfully, for his liquor license to retain the drinkers. However progress has come to town and Kelly's keeps up. Upstairs is a function room called "The Bus Stop". Named after his father, Gord tells of the success he has initiated in this space. "In 2002 we finished renting rooms, we would have finished earlier but one man refused to leave so we waited him out. With the rooms removed this space then became a place for large gatherings, weddings and the like and it's a place for the bands to play. Besides with two sons wanting jobs we needed the revenue from a larger space"



**Gord II - Bus, memorialised in the upstairs room**

Kelly's is now a full service sports bar, more than a place to watch the TV in the corner and drink beer. "We have always had a kitchen but now it's open longer and serves a full menu. We really have to keep up in the summer on Saturdays, when the boaters come in for their breakfasts."

Bands play three nights a week and on Saturdays from 3pm to 7pm. “Everybody gets along and sometimes I have to ask the band to reduce the volume so that folks can hear themselves talk.”



**The upstairs multi-function room - The Bus Stop**

Asked about future plans, Gord just says that they will continue to do what they are doing now. The business model works well. Two of Gord’s sons, Gord (IV) and Kris are working with him and split the managerial duties between them. “We work well together and all decisions are hashed out between the three of us. Kris is a good fit with the music side of things as he is a musician with a local band called “Skin Davey” but in reality Gordie does

the bookings.” It must be working well as the 62 year old has cut his hours at the shop. “You will never see me here after 5pm” Looking back on forty one years in the business, he started helping Bus on the first day he was legally allowed to drink (twenty-one back in August of 1970) the major changes have been the attitude to drinking and driving and the implementation of the smoking ban in public and private spaces. “I kept quiet on the smoking ban discussion but was pleased when it came in, before the ban there was a cloud of smoke everywhere - not nice. And as to drinking and driving, it’s a generational thing. The kids today have grown up with it, it’s our generation (talking about his and the writer’s age) that have a problem with it. But I love the clientele as it exists today, from the oldtime regulars to the youngsters just out for a good time.” Another bane of the business has been the constant regulation of the entertainment business. From the need for certified bartenders to the hiring of mandatory doormen to the overzealous LCBO inspector that bothered all of Cobourg’s establishments a couple of years ago. But they cope and change is even welcomed as it broadens the scope of the business, “I am serving more wine than ever then I ever did this year.”

When asked for a final comment in the interview Gord pauses and then tells of his love for the business. “I love working with the kids - Kris and Gordie, I love the business and I love the sports minded way the bar thinks.” He tells of the characters he has met over the years and tells Business Times that Kelly’s Homelike Inn is all about the camaraderie, warm and friendly people and beverages and food. From the young, who find that the place is a spot to have a good time and feel their wild oats, to the regulars who meet every morning to play their cards this is an institution in more than one definition of the word.