

# Fat Cat's

From A1

"He just fell in love with Lake Geneva, and said it felt like home," friend Lisa Elsinger said. "He never wanted to live anywhere else."

Born in Joliet, Boroni was the son and only child of immigrants from Italy.

His father operated a coal yard in Joliet, and Boroni worked there and in factories after graduating from high school.

He was married briefly, but the marriage did not last, and he never had any children.

Soon, Boroni and his friends discovered an active nightlife two hours north in Lake Geneva. There, Boroni developed a deep affection for the tavern-going lifestyle.

"He liked seeing people have a good time," longtime friend Joe Milek said. "He himself got a kick

out of that."

By the time he reached his early 30s, Boroni relocated to Lake Geneva and began making plans for his own tavern.

When he opened Fat Cat's around 1972 near the downtown lakefront, the community was already experiencing a renaissance with the Lake Geneva Playboy Club. From 1968 to 1981, Playboy brought Hollywood glitz and glamour to Lake Geneva.

Fat Cat's became a destination of choice among Playboy Club employees, as well as visiting entertainers.

Boroni soon found himself playing host to such celebrities as Red Buttons, Lainie Kazan, the Smothers Brothers and Jerry Van Dyke.

"He loved the Playboy era," Elsinger said. "It was exciting. It was glamorous."

As a meticulous person, Boroni prided himself on implementing efficient operational systems



**Boroni**

in his business. Employees wore glow-in-the-dark accents, for example, so that customers could always find someone to take an order for drinks.

When celebrities were not in attendance, Boroni entertained patrons by presenting lip-synching contests, lizard races or other novelty attractions.

And he gave away T-shirts and other collectibles emblazoned with the Fat Cat's name, making sure that customers from the Chicago area went home with merchandise promoting Lake Geneva's newest nightspot.

"You know how places just grow and catch on?" Milek said. "That's what happened to Fat Cat's."

Although the tavern still exists today in the same place, Boroni sold the business in the 1980s, because he wanted to try some-

thing bigger.

That was when he opened City Slickers, a tavern around the corner on Main Street that was about three times larger than Fat Cat's. Capitalizing on a country-and-western fad at the time, Boroni installed an electronic bull-riding machine.

City Slickers also was large enough that Boroni brought in live musical acts and comedy groups, and organized dance contests.

For all of the emphasis on entertainment, though, Boroni never lost sight of the bottom line.

"He ran it like a real business," Trester said. "He was good."

Another former employee, Carol Satter, said Boroni set goals for his employees. Each year, the bartender credited with the most sales got a free vacation in Florida.

"He treated us great," Satter said.

Boroni later closed City Slickers and decided to make a brief move to Florida. He opened another

place called Fat Cat's in Hollywood, Florida. But after six or seven years, he called it quits and returned to Lake Geneva.

He worked as a consultant to help other tavern owners. He also dabbled privately in painting, sculpture and other artwork.

When employees of the old Lake Geneva Playboy Club held a 50-year anniversary reunion in 2018, Boroni was in attendance to reconnect with old Fat Cat's customers and friends.

With no surviving family members, Boroni told those close to him that he did not want any funeral service for himself. A small group of friends planned a private remembrance in Lake Geneva, the community that meant so much to him.

In a memory posted on Facebook, Elsinger wrote: "Bill loved the Lake Geneva life. He worked hard to create nightclubs where people could have fun, be entertained, and feel welcomed."