

# **THEY CAME TO SAY GOODBYE!**

D C Club wasn't much to look at. Area old-timers believe it had been in operation since the 1930's and was possibly the oldest such establishment in Lenawee County. A dark and dingy little beergarden, some would even call it a dive. Many would call it by the other name it was known as; Just a Friendly Little Bar! A nondescript little place with a seating capacity of only 49 people with seemingly not much to offer. The floor was uneven, and the smoke stained ceiling and walls were covered with signatures, love notes, and graffiti written over the years by the patrons who frequented the small tavern. Some called it home. You know the place. You've been there or someplace just like it! Bars like this are to be found in nearly every locale. It is hard to understand why such a tavern could be so popular when there were bigger, better, cleaner and more glitzy clubs in the area, but popular it was. No glamour, glitz, or character, just a good place to visit and have a beer. There was an aura of nostalgia and a bit of sadness in the air when on Valentines Day in 2006 an estimated crowd of 200 gathered to participate in a scheduled salvage and contents auction. They came to bid and buy and more importantly; they came to reminisce and say good-bye.

The owners had called and asked about doing a salvage auction. The property had been sold and the bar was scheduled for demolition. I remember driving over with some doubts and misgivings. There was nothing about the place that would lead one to believe an auction would work. After all, most of the good stuff, i.e., pool table, game machines etc had been leased and would not be part of an auction. What was left? A small, aging building with little to offer. Worn out tables, chairs, bar stools, beer glasses, kitchen equipment, two toilets, and a urinal. Who would possibly be interested in this auction? I wasn't surprised to learn the owners had similar concerns, as they wished to have an auction, but with a very conservative advertising budget. It was obvious to me they were afraid the expenses might be greater than monies realized from an auction. Still, there were items there they didn't need, but the owners wanted as little as possible to end up at the landfill. We all knew that if nothing else, the place was packed with memories. We met, talked about an auction, took a tour of the bar, made a list, signed a contract, and booked the auction. I had hoped we could draw a crowd of perhaps fifty people, and with a selection of beer signs included; perhaps we could gross a couple of thousand dollars. Dare I imagine grossing three thousand? That thought was quickly dismissed. I would be lucky to pay the expenses.

The weeks leading up to the auction proved to be a stressful time for the owners, patrons, and the auctioneer. Many loyal customers felt as though they should be given a souvenir in exchange for all of their years of loyalty. Others tried to buy their treasures prior to the auction. The owner realized there was no fair way of doing that and told everyone who asked that they would have to attend the auction. They had a good-bye party the last night the bar was open for business. The Club was packed and the crowd

was in the mood for a wild and raucous night and they drank and partied until closing time. A few decided they had a right to help themselves to some items of interest. The bar mirrors and signs had previously been removed for safekeeping, so two of the locals decided to walk out with a small neon clock. Apparently they didn't want to take their chances at the auction. They were not very far down the road when they managed to put their car in the ditch. When the police arrived, the two inebriated men could not seem to agree as to who was driving. Both claimed to be the driver, so both went to jail. The clock went back to the club. Neither of the men involved was able to make it to the auction. I guess they had a prior commitment and somebody else now owns the clock! Perhaps it was frustration over the sign and mirrors being removed or just despair that the bar was being closed that motivated someone to take their feelings out on the auctioneer. It must have seemed like a good idea to destroy the brand new auction sign placed adjacent to the parking area. Not as good as stealing a souvenir, but perhaps there was some sense of gratification from their vandalism. The bartender on duty had to literally force his customers out the door at closing time, only to lock up and discover someone had stolen his tips for the night. As crazy as it was, we would soon learn it was just a mild prelude to what was yet to come.

I arrived at the D C Club mid-morning on Valentines Day. I like to arrive early, just to insure the final set up goes smoothly. Most items were stacked neatly on tables and left in the tavern, while small items of a lesser value were placed outside on tables. We had decided to do this partly because of concerns with the weather and partly because of concerns of theft. It had turned out be a rather nice day, if you can have a nice day in the middle of February in the state of Michigan. My help was at a minimum, so I decided to stick with the plan we had and hold the bulk of the auction inside. Odds and ends were outside with a few nice large items that would entice the crowd to come outside. My plan was to start the auction with the tables outdoors, work around the building selling what salvage I could, and then get everyone inside before it got too dark. Not that it mattered, because even though the door was propped open, it was quite dark in the bar. I had thought the crowd outside was large and didn't realize most of the bidders had been patiently waiting inside. It took just minutes until the bar area was so crowded no one was able to move. Sort of like packing sardines in a can! I was about to learn that it didn't matter what took place outside; inside we were about to embark on one of the craziest, intense, and most exciting auctions ever.

I stood up on a small stand I had built for this purpose, with a table filled with various items in front of me. Completely encircled by wall-to-wall people, I needed to talk to the crowd for just a few minutes while my eyes became adjusted to the dark conditions. The shop lights I had hung were of little use. The room was dark and it was difficult to see, but gradually I could see light reflecting off people's glasses and it wasn't long before I could actually see most of the bidders. As soon as I had a chance I got my wife's attention and told her there was an item that had been left in the beer cooler that we had overlooked. I asked her to pull it out and advise me as to whether or not anyone would have any interest in it. Rebecca does not always trust me and the expression on her face was evidence of this as she squeezed through the crowd on her way to the beer cooler. Rebecca reached in the cooler, pulled the item in question out, and turned

around with a large grin on her face, a card and small bouquet of flowers clutched tightly in her hands. Smiling faces and applause is such a wonderful way to start an auction!

You wouldn't think an auction could work in such dark and crowded conditions, but did it ever. When an auction gets this exciting and the bidding gets this spirited, an auctioneer gets a natural high that no drug or drink could ever duplicate. Almost like an out of body experience, it is truly an amazing sensation. Have you ever seen those little plastic baskets they put the cheeseburgers in? I had put a group of those in a box expecting to get two or three dollars. The buyers thought so too. My eyes had become accustomed to the dark and I could see the amazed look on the bidder's faces when I dropped the hammer at twenty dollars! There were more surprises. Boxes of beer glasses. No names, nothing that made them special. I expected perhaps five dollars a box. The prices averaged out at over twenty dollar per box. Plastic beer banners ranged between twelve dollars and fifty cents to seventeen fifty apiece. These were not the exceptions. The entire auction went that way. Deep fryers, cookware, paper towels, cleaning supplies; it didn't seem to matter what was held up. About the only things we could not sell were the two toilets and a single urinal! The bidding was fast, spirited, and intensely crazy. Beer signs and bar mirrors sold just as well although I was not quite as surprised. I expected strong prices from those items. We walked quickly through the bar, selling all desired salvage items, such as lights, coolers, compressors, then moved into the kitchen with the crowd following close behind. The place was still packed and I was soon to learn the bidders had been waiting patiently for the two hundred and ten dollar stainless steel table and the soon to be four hundred and seventy dollar ice machine. Suddenly, we were at the last item and this auction was over as quickly as it had started. It took just scant minutes for the crowd to disappear with their purchases, leaving behind a quiet, suddenly lonely place that for many years had lived with such strong vitality and was now just an empty shell. As we packed up our equipment to leave, I was overwhelmed with such an eerie sense of loneliness. It was almost as though I had just left a funeral; in spite of a strong sense of satisfaction, knowing we had just tripled our pre auction expectations.

I have conducted hundreds of auctions over the years, many of which have been unique and unusual. Many in less than desirable conditions. I don't think I have ever been involved in any auction quite like this one. Too many people. Too small of a space. So dark you could barely spot your bidders. Logic and common sense dictated everything to be sold should have been arranged outside on tables under the spotlight of the sun. Logic and common sense had told me there were few items of value or interest in this auction. Logic and common sense had nothing to do with this auction. Psychology, emotions and the need for some 200 people to come and celebrate the passing of this tiny tavern sitting at the side of the road is what made this auction such a wild, crazy, and maddening success! People came to remember the dancing, the singing of karaoke, the beers that were drunk, the dates that were made, the fights that took place and lifelong friendships that all started here. All of these memories of years gone by were in attendance, planted firmly in the minds of all the people who stopped to say; Good bye to the D.C. Club. Just a Friendly Little Bar.

**Written by Auctioneer Lyn Liechty March 15, 2006**

[www.lynliechty.com](http://www.lynliechty.com)