

## Cleveland GIFT Celebrates 30<sup>th</sup> Tournament

The 30<sup>th</sup> edition of Cleveland's GLBT Invitational Fellowship Tournament (GIFT) was held the weekend of June 8 – 10 and bowler capacity was reached for the eighth consecutive year! The GIFT 2018 Committee welcomed 184 bowlers from 93 cities across 12 states and Canada to the North Coast to participate in what attendees have described as one of the most well executed (and least expensive) tournaments on the IGBO circuit. This year's tournament also featured a 9-pin No-tap Event on Friday evening hosted by AMF Brookgate Lanes, the bowling home of Cleveland GIFT, as well as the second annual Scratch Masters Event sponsored by Lanham Services.

Once again, due to the generosity of GIFT sponsors Tito's Handmade Vodka, Miller Lite, Lanham Services, Cocktails CLE, Storm, and Marriott, and the tremendous fundraising efforts of the GIFT Committee throughout the year leading up to the tournament, the guaranteed \$12,000 prize fund was increased to \$13,025! (This equates to an average of a nearly \$70 in prize funds per bowler...not bad for an \$80 entry fee!) Prize fund checks were mailed to 121 different bowlers, representing 65% of all registered bowlers.

In honor of the tournament's 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, all bowlers and guests were given a commemorative 30-year micro-fiber bowling towel in their Registration Welcome Bags. Bowling event winners were awarded hand-made glass trophies in various sizes and colors for their efforts. Bowlers and guests were also treated to an Open Bar all weekend in the Cleveland GIFT/Miller Lite Hospitality Suite.

An additional \$20,705 was paid out in other events, including Optional Scratch, Scratch Masters, Cash Raffles, Brackets, Mystery Score, Strike Pot and Strike Ball, bringing the grand total of money paid out over the weekend to \$33,730! In addition to the cash prizes, four Storm bowling balls and a pair of gift baskets filled with items donated by Tito's Vodka were raffled off during the weekend.

Congratulations to Steve Homer from Grand Rapids, MI, on his perfect 300 game and George Miller from Northville, MI, whose nearly perfect 299 game was 102 pins above his entering average! During the Doubles Event, Chris Harnish from Hamilton, OH, had a nice 784 Scratch Series and Christy Iraci from Buffalo, NY, rolled a great 834 Handicap Series. The "Luckiest Bowler" award has to go to Chris Howell from Monessen, PA, whose name was drawn in the Strike Pot Raffle during the third game of the Team event. Chris overcame the intense pressure and rolled a strike that was worth \$955! Complete tournament results can be viewed on the GIFT website ([www.clevelandgift.org](http://www.clevelandgift.org)) and have been uploaded to the IGBO database.

As has been a GIFT tradition since 1986, cash donations were made to several deserving Northeast Ohio organizations. This year, one of our corporate sponsors, Tito's Handmade Vodka, pledged \$6,000 to be donated to three designated organizations. The LGBT Center of Greater Cleveland, CANAPI (Community AIDS Network/Akron Pride Initiative) and GLSEN (Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network) each received \$2,000 to support their essential work throughout Northeast Ohio. The cumulative donation total now stands at over \$35,000.

The 30<sup>th</sup> Annual GIFT Cruise (sponsored by Tito's Handmade Vodka) embarked on Saturday evening, June 9. Originally envisioned as "something for the bowlers to do on Saturday night", this event has taken on a life of its own! Although the weather was less than ideal, over 400 folks were treated to a two and one half hour excursion on the Cuyahoga River and Lake Erie and enjoyed spectacular views of the ever-changing Cleveland skyline. While some cruisers enjoyed the cityscape and conversations on the open-air third deck, the second deck dance floor was crowded all night. Next year's 31<sup>st</sup> annual excursion is already booked for Saturday, June 8, 2019!

The Awards Banquet was once again held in the Cleveland Airport Marriott Grand Ballroom on Sunday evening. After being welcomed by six-time Director Ed Progar, bowlers and guests honored America and Canada by singing both National Anthems (led by "Committee Member for Life" and seven-time past GIFT Director Jim Gruzosky) and enjoyed a delicious buffet dinner and dessert while a nostalgic video montage of photos from the past 30 years was presented for all to see. The program portion of the Banquet also included Jerry SESCO, IGBO North

American Heartland Regional Director, who spoke about the organization and presented the GIFT Committee with a donation of \$300 in honor of the 30<sup>th</sup> GIFT event. Ed accepted the donation on behalf of the Committee and stated that the donation will be forwarded to the ALS Association Northern Ohio Chapter both in memory of his father, Edward, who passed away 12 years ago due to complications from ALS and in honor of frequent GIFT bowler Geno Aragona, Ft. Lauderdale, who continues to valiantly battle the disease. The GIFT Committee presented Jerry with a check for \$300 to be used to help defray the costs for IGBO Mid-year in Reno, Nevada. Also during the program, Michael O'Brien from Columbus, OH, was presented with a "Perfect Attendance" award and recognized for his participation in every single GIFT tournament (including IGBO Annual 1998). Ed also presented Brad Town with a trophy and Storm Certificate in recognition of his "retirement" after a 14-year tenure on the GIFT Committee.

To round out the evening, Michael O'Brien graciously recognized Jim Gruzosky and Ed Progar for over 30 years of dedication to Cleveland GIFT and Bob Lach gave an emotional tribute to outgoing Director Ed Progar. Bob presented Ed with a beautifully framed 30-year GIFT bowling towel and brass lighthouse-themed picture frame holding a "thank you" message from the GIFT 2018 Committee.

Cleveland GIFT always occurs during the second full weekend in June and has become one of the premier tournaments on the IGBO circuit as evidenced by 8 consecutive sell-outs. Plans are already under way for the 31<sup>st</sup> edition of Cleveland GIFT, which will be held the weekend of June 7 – 9, 2019, under the co-direction of Eric Strong and Kevin Lord. Additional information can be found at the tournament website [www.clevelandgift.org](http://www.clevelandgift.org). Remember to "like" us on Facebook as well!