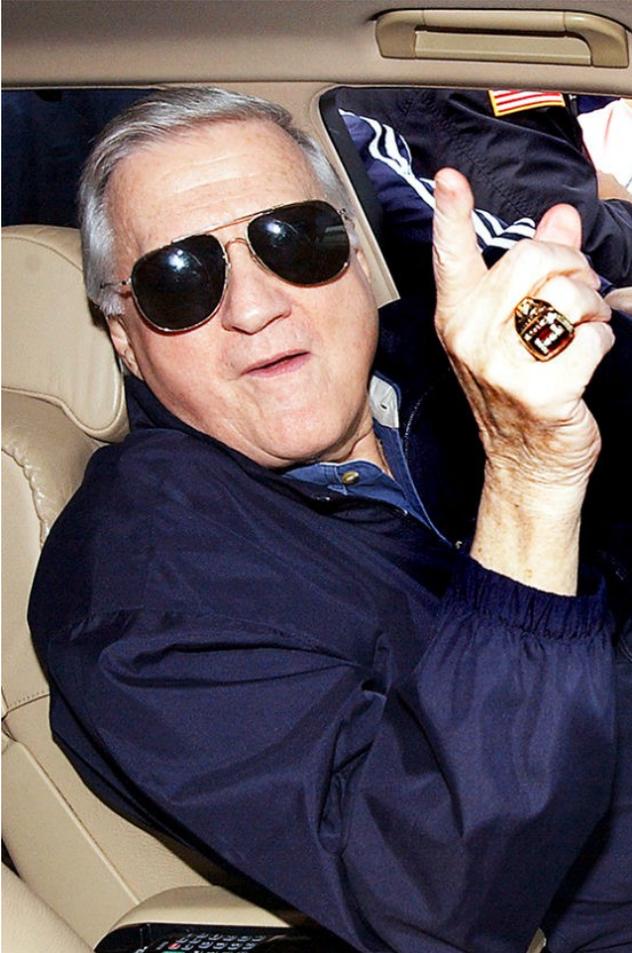


# Recalling ‘The Boss’ And His Generosity

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*George Steinbrenner's generosity was extended to many through the years, including a collection of New York Yankees fans from Dunkirk/Fredonia. AP file photo*

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following article on the late George Steinbrenner and the impact he had on an area resident first appeared in The Post-Journal several years ago. With Friday marking the eighth anniversary of his passing, it was deemed appropriate to run the story again to show a side of "The Boss" that the general public didn't often see.

*Glad to hear that you'll be coming into New York for a Yankee game.*

*Please let me know what game you plan to attend and the number of tickets you will need. You can get*

*in touch with my secretary, Judy Serra, and she will make all the necessary arrangements for you.*

— *George Steinbrenner*

Dave Polechetti and his dozen or so friends from Dunkirk/Fredonia make their way out of Municipal Stadium in Cleveland. It's July 1974 and they have just seen their beloved New York Yankees get thumped by the Indians.

It figures to be an especially long trip home on Interstate 90 for Polechetti and company, but before they reach the gate at the venerable stadium on Lake Erie, Polechetti hears someone say, "Don't worry, we're going to get them in New York."

Polechetti turns his head, sees the man who made the comment and then blurts out: "That's right, Mr. Steinbrenner!"

Immediately, George M. Steinbrenner III, the Yankees' 44-year-old managing general partner, walks toward the northern Chautauqua County residents and engages them in conversation and asks if they'd like to attend a game in the Big Apple.

Steinbrenner hands Polechetti his business card and tells him to call his personal secretary to make the arrangements.

An unlikely friendship is born.

Lifelong memories are about to be made.

Polechetti, 64, is retired now after teaching 35 years at Fredonia Central School. Although he lived in Dunkirk growing up, his mother was a Jamestown native and the Polechettis would frequently make trips to the south county to visit family.

That was OK with Polechetti, because it was in Jamestown that he could watch the Yankees' games on television.

"Jamestown was one of the first communities in Chautauqua County that got cable," he said. "It was like a dream come true."

Once he got older, it wasn't unusual for Polechetti and his buddies to jump in the car, drive to Jamestown and watch the games on his aunt's TV and, once the game was over, hop back in the car and return to Dunkirk. WPIX, the New York City station that carried Yankees games in those days, was the source of great entertainment.

And then, of course, there were the times that the group would take off for Cleveland when the Bronx Bombers were in town so it could watch the games in person. Like in 1974.

That was the year in which Polechetti's well-timed comment — "That's right, Mr. Steinbrenner" — resulted in The Boss demonstrating his generosity and kindness that never made headlines, but was as much a part of the man's DNA as his bombastic public persona.

A few weeks after the Dunkirk/Fredonia group had its postgame chat with Steinbrenner in July 1974, Polechetti received a letter in the mail. It was from Steinbrenner, who invited them to New York to attend a Yankees game. At that time, the Bronx Bombers were playing their home games at Shea Stadium in Flushing, because Yankee Stadium was in the midst of an extensive renovation.

A date was set — a four-game series with the Chicago White Sox the weekend of Aug. 19 — and Polechetti's excitement was off the charts.

Initially, of the 11 people who made the trip to Cleveland a few weeks before only four could commit to go to New York. So Polechetti reached out to some acquaintances in Fredonia, who were also huge Yankees fans. By the time they left for the Big Apple there were eight in the traveling party — Polechetti, Bob Warren, Larry Malta, Jake McCune, Ron Everett, Mike Scaglione, Mark Valentine and Tom Hammond.

At 3 a.m., Aug. 19, 1974, the group left for New York City and the two-night doubleheader that day.

Upon arrival at Shea Stadium, the group found its tickets at the press gate, which also included passes for cocktails and steak dinners in the exclusive “Diamond Club.” Steinbrenner also connected with the local men each day, including between games of the doubleheader that Friday.

“As a Yankees’ fan, it was like a dream come true,” Polechetti said. “It was unbelievable to be his personal guest. It was like we had died and gone to heaven.”

Ultimately, photos were taken of Steinbrenner with the guys from Dunkirk/Fredonia. In one of them, Steinbrenner visited the group at its box seats, donned a Yankees’ helmet, smiled broadly and said, according to Polechetti, “I bet you can root hard from here.”

The Yankees ended up winning three of the four games that weekend in what was only the beginning of a special relationship Polechetti and company had with the Yankees’ owner. As a thank you for his kindness, the locals sent T-shirts to Steinbrenner and his secretary, and even invited him to attend a Buffalo Bills game at Rich Stadium (Steinbrenner was good friends of then-Bills coach Lou Saban).

Trips to New York continued in 1975 and 1976. After a two-year hiatus, the locals planned to return to the Bronx in 1979, but days before they were to arrive, Yankees catcher Thurman Munson was killed in a plane crash. They decided not to go.

Nevertheless, a friendship had been forged.

In a letter dated Oct. 28, 1977 — a few weeks after the Yanks’ World Series victory over the Los Angeles Dodgers — and addressed to the “Dunkirk-Fredonia Yankee Die-Hards,” Steinbrenner wrote:

*Dear Gang,*

*Well, you’ve been with us on a very close personal basis for the past couple years, and we finally got the job done for you. I know you were disappointed last year with the way the Series ended, but we didn’t let you down this time, and we won’t be letting you down in the future.*

*I miss seeing you guys. I still have my teeshirt (sic) and I wear it a lot. In fact, I wore it in a benefit softball game with the other Yankee guys last winter.*

*Keep me posted on how you’re all doing. I got as close to you as Buffalo a couple of weeks ago but it was for a funeral, so I didn’t have a chance to call and say hello.*

*Keep the faith. We’ll be back next year!*

*Your friend,*

*George*

More than 35 years later, Polechetti still can’t believe Steinbrenner’s generosity.

“Wouldn’t you like your other sports teams to have owners like George Steinbrenner?” Polechetti said. “The thing about George is he refused to lose. As a fan, how can you not like that.

“He actually was one of the guys.”