

*“Captain Easy”*  
Hard Act to Follow

by Tim Ernandes



The Tom Maynard Memorial Poker Run is a popular annual event at Smith Mountain Lake. Saturday, May 18th, will mark the Poker Run's 16th year, yet there is still some confusion as to its purpose, and few recall its origins.

Let's start with the Poker Run's namesake. Tom Maynard is to the Smith Mountain Lake Boating Association what Henry Ford is to the family sedan. Ask almost anyone who he was, and you're likely to hear "He's the guy that they named the poker run after," or some other equally profound informational tidbit.

A quick web search will more likely yield information about a young Welsh cricketer, who recently met his untimely end while being pursued by law enforcement officers in London. Indeed, while the locally revered Tom Maynard may not enjoy wide celebrity status, he is nonetheless someone who had a profound effect on the quality of life here at Smith Mountain Lake.

Tom's life at the lake began as many do; he was working for Allstate Insurance in Roanoke, and eventually purchased a condo here for weekend getaways. While working at Allstate, he met his future wife, Susan, also a part time lake resident.

"We actually met at Allstate, but we became friends because we both had places at the lake," she

recalls. They eventually married in 1992. "Tom was a very intelligent man, very friendly, community-oriented... very good sense of humor... he had a lot of stories from his background that he would tell."



One of his favorites involved a conversation that he had with his father, shortly after his graduation from high school in 1961. His father wanted to know what his plans were, now that he had his high school diploma. Tom mused that he might like to take some time off, whereupon he was marched down to the local Army recruiter, and signed on for a 3-year hitch, separating from the Army with the rank of Sergeant. He always finished the tale remarking that from that point on, he remained focused on more productive pursuits.

An avid boater and motorcyclist, Tom hung up his chaps after a freak accident almost cost him his foot. From then on, he concentrated all of his passions on boating. Anyone who enjoys boating on Smith Mountain Lake should be pleased that he did.

Always active in the community, Tom became involved with the Smith Mountain Lake Association. In the mid-90's, concerns began to arise over the "growing pains" that were affecting the lake. As the lake population grew, problems with unsafe boating practices increased. Recognizing the need for action, many SMLA members called for legislation to establish speed limits and stringent "no wake" rules in all coves.

Tom and a few like-minded colleagues in the SMLA agreed with the need for action, but thought it better to approach the problem by other means. They reasoned that onerous laws might result in greater safety, but often at the cost of personal freedom. Since they differed considerably from the rest of the organization on this point, they formed the Smith Mountain Lake Boating Association. Under Tom's leadership, the SMLBA spearheaded programs for boater education and safety on the lake. "Education, not legislation", a phrase coined by Tom Maynard, became their motto.

Part of their agenda included boating safety classes, which the Boating Association promotes through the SML Sail & Power Squadron. Tom became a certified instructor for the Virginia Boating Basics course, and wrote a boating safety tips column in The Smith

## Maynard Continued...

Mountain Eagle during the summer. He was recognized by his peers as a “driving force” in the community. His boundless enthusiasm helped to promote many lake area initiatives, including the SML Water Quality Task Force, the Tri-County Chamber Alliance, and The Franklin County Tourism Advisory Council.

Soon, the SMLBA saw the need to raise funds as a means of realizing a lot of its goals, and once again, Tom Maynard stepped up to the plate. His brainchild, the annual Poker Run, brought in thousands of dollars in funding for their various efforts to preserve and promote boating safety and the quality of life at the lake. This would eventually include

the SML Marine Fire and Rescue Company, which is a critical first responder. SML Fire and Rescue is often able to reach lake residents faster than any other entity, which often means the fastest response times for medical emergencies, even on dry land.

Tom never seemed to be too busy or too tired to take on a new challenge, or to enjoy time with friends. Susan recalls, “His nickname was ‘Captain Easy’, because when people would pour him drinks he would say, ‘Easy, easy, not too much liquor in there!’... so I had a little hat made for him that said ‘Captain

Easy’, because that’s what people started calling him.” Ergo, his boating safety column was billed as Captain Easy’s Boating Safety Tips.

One might get the impression that such a busy fellow would tend to overlook details, but Tom’s reputation says otherwise. He was well regarded by his peers as



someone who never spoke on a subject until after he had researched it thoroughly. “Most everyone respected him, for his strong opinion and willingness to learn everything about a subject before he voiced his opinion,” his friend Carl Whitman recalled in a speech, as he presented Tom with the Norma Jean Tess Award posthumously.

Another friend, Marshall Prillaman, remembers, “Once he had an idea, he wouldn’t let it go until he had finished what he had started.”

Several months following the

second year’s Poker Run, Tom suffered a stroke during surgery to correct an aneurism, and died at the relatively young age of 56. To his many friends, it was as if a speeding train had been brought to a sudden halt. Through those friends, and his legacy, Tom Maynard lives on.

Prillaman is certain of it. “We were having a lot of accidents on the lake. People would rent boats for a day, and go out there, and have an accident... we actually produced DVDs that people who rented boats had to watch... I think Tom would be extremely pleased... a lot of boaters have been educated because of a vision that he had so many years ago.”

A popular story that invokes his memory involves one friend who invited someone to the lake one day for a party. This friend recalls people splashing and playing in the lake, having a generally good time, and then seeing a preacher appear and begin speaking. The guest began to feel awkward as he realized that this was no ordinary party. It was a memorial service for Tom Maynard. This preacher set the assembly at ease when he remarked that this was precisely the right way to celebrate Tom’s life: a crowd of people enjoying themselves safely in the lake.



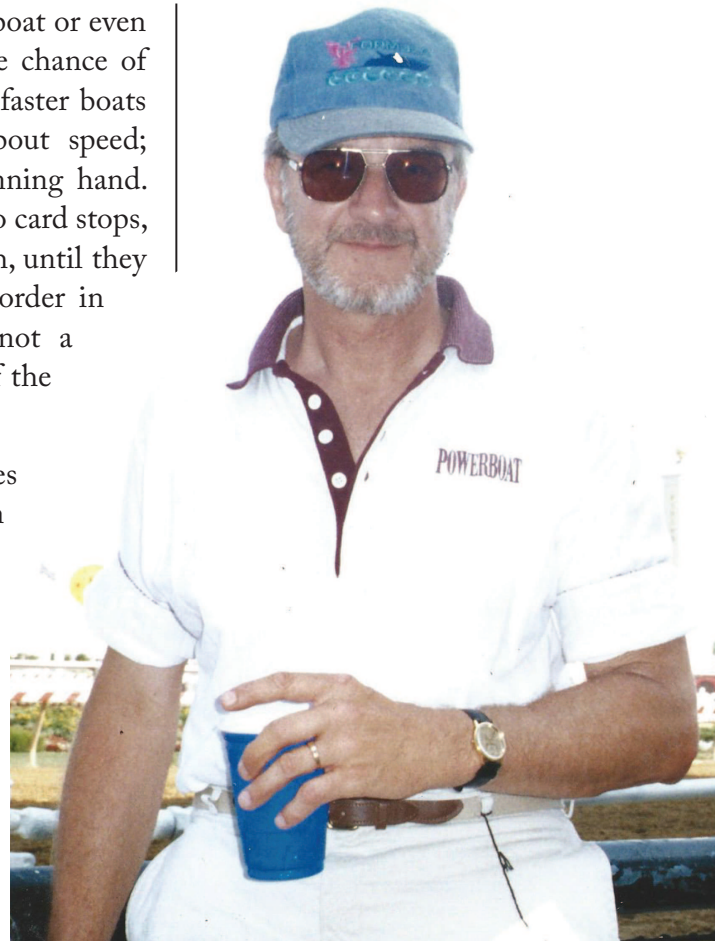
Tom Maynard served two terms as president of the Boating Association, and was VP of the SML Chamber when he passed away. Small wonder that today, the SML Poker Run proudly bears his name.

Today, the Tom Maynard Memorial Poker Run continues to serve as a vital force in our community. It provides participants with a great waterborne event, and funding for essential services that keep the lake safe and clean. Yet, even today, as the SMLBA prepares for the 16th annual running, the Poker Run remains at least somewhat misunderstood.

Although it tends to attract a number of large, loud, and flashy boats, the emphasis on safety is paramount. The nature of the event

is such that a pontoon boat or even a sailboat has the same chance of winning a prize as the faster boats do, because it isn't about speed; it's about having a winning hand. Players must navigate to card stops, collecting a card at each, until they have a full hand. The order in which they finish is not a factor. Thus, the luck of the draw is all that matters.

In the end, scores of people have an exciting, fun-filled weekend, out-of-state participants bring their tourist dollars to the lake, and thousands of dollars are raised for water quality and boating safety. Well played, Captain Easy.



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