

I Can't Even Believe It!

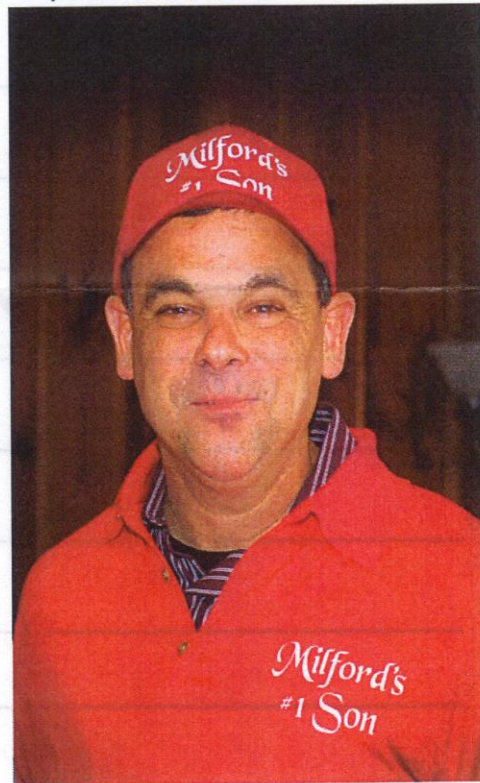
A pretty great party happened for me on Saturday, January 14th at Miami Boat Club. It was really something. Mr. Knepp and his "side kick" Mike Minnear came and rang the bell and made a little speech. Ed Humphries gave me a certificate saying I was a pretty good guy and it was endorsed by the Clermont County Board of Commissioners. My parents, brothers and sisters organized local businesses, family and friends to provide loads and loads of food and beverages. (Wow, there was a lot.)

We had football games, warm fires, and Matt Snow came to sing with Marilyn Monroe. But I think what I loved the most and what I will remember the best is that so many people seemed so happy that evening as we all sang, danced, laughed and drank some beers together. I had a fantastic time everyone. Thank you for making my 50th Birthday such a blast.

Johnny Vilardo - 50 years and Loving it!

matt snow

Thank You
For coming
To my Party
and The CD
You are great
From Johnny





Milford resident Johnny Vilardo, center, took the golf gold medal in Level 4 nine-hole stroke play at the national Special Olympics in June in New Jersey. THANKS TO JOHN WRIGHT

Milford man wins golf gold

By Mark D. Motz
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MILFORD — Not everyone rolls into town riding atop a fire engine.

Johnny Vilardo does.

Why not? Vilardo went all Tiger-Woods-in-his-prime, winning by 17 strokes against a field of 39 golfers from around the country in the national Special Olympic golf tournament June 16 to 18 in Princeton, New Jersey. Police and fire personnel from Milford and Miami Township met him on the way home and gave him a lift to the Milford Skyline for his victory celebration.

This after having a police escort into Princeton at the start of the games and being featured on Columbus television as the Ohio Special Olympics delegation left for competition in private Cessna jets. To say nothing of his dinner cruise around Man-

hattan one night during the games.

"The hoopla around him has been amazing," said Susan Vilardo, Johnny's sister and roommate. "I don't know if I can hang out with Johnny any more," she added with her tongue firmly in cheek. "It's too much."

The 52-year-old Vilardo said matter of factly, "I made some fantastic shots."

Among them was a 26-foot birdie in the final round, during which he needed only 15 putts. "I shot 44 (over nine holes at the Mercer County Golf Course) the first day and was leading by seven strokes. Then I just went on a tear."

He finished with rounds of 47 and 42 for a 133 total; the next closer player carded a 150.

"It was fantastic," he said. "I had a little bit of tears at the end. I just

thought of my dad (who died two years ago this November). He was looking down on me, looking out for me. My dad taught us how to play golf."

Vilardo - who has been a Kroger courtesy clerk at the Milford store the last 15 years - had plenty of family help growing up.

"He doesn't think of himself as disabled," Susan Vilardo said. "He was born with a club foot and one leg longer than the other. He had a lot of operations as a kid. He grew up with a cast on his foot and wore a brace for a long time.

"When he was maybe 3 or 4 years old, he was diagnosed with mental retardation, what we now would call mild cerebral palsy and autistic tendencies. But in those days, the professional recommendation was to have him institutionalized. That just wasn't an option in our

family.

"Johnny and my brothers developed an interest in and passion for golf. Johnny really developed this talent. He has this very unique gait striding up to the ball, but then he just crushes it. I'm more amazed now watching somebody who hasn't seen him play when they react to how well he hits it.

"He also has quite the eye. I've never known him to lose a ball. And he is always finding balls in the woods. We have balls he found all over our house."

Vilardo took up the game at age 10 or 11 and has fond memories playing with his dad at Terrace Park Country Club. Now he usually plays at least once a week at Cedar Trace Golf Course in Stonelick Township.

"It takes practice," he said. "But I love to play. I play whenever I can, really. I love it."