

## Ed Witkowski

by Doug Kent

Our story begins in 1851 when 6 million people visited the first World Exposition where Queen Victoria opened the Expo at the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, London, England. Fast forward now to June 7<sup>th</sup> 1948, in Southampton, New York where another memorable event took place, that was the birth of Mr. April (Mr. A). The second oldest of four siblings, Mr. A experienced a normal childhood, being an average student in Catholic grade school and participating in several school plays. While in the fourth grade, he actually did an impersonation of Elvis. During his teen years, he visited the 1964 New York World's Fair and became fascinated with its grandeur. He delved into the history of past Expos, and began collecting items and materials from as far back as 1851.

High School was not as kind to Mr. A. Born blind in one eye, he was mercilessly teased throughout the four years, but this did not prevent Mr. A from earning his diploma in 1966. He worked part time throughout high school at the local movie theater. When he turned 18 years of age, he began to tend bar at a private beach club to earn money for college.

In the fall of 1966 he traveled to Ohio to begin his college career at the University of Toledo. He rented an apartment off campus. A friend introduced Mr. A to the 5 gay bars that were in the Toledo area and from here Mr. A never looked back. He had tremendous fun in his apartment. Oh, what a life Mr. A experienced. He tended bar and worked part time all through college and managed to finance his entire education. He graduated in 1970 with a BA in History. Tips must have been good, and Mr. A managed to purchase a 1969 Fiat, 850 Spider convertible, which only added to his fun college days.

Upon graduation, he moved to Los Angeles, California just in time to experience the Sylmar earthquake. He immediately moved back home to New York. In 1971 he took a position with the Fashion Institute of Technology. He remained there for six years being responsible for cataloging, researching, appraising items and coordinating details for museum loans. With his extensive experience and his love of history he then decided to open an antique mall and consultancy business in Manhattan. His business broadened, his exposure to other Expo collectors increased and his collection grew in size and prestige.

Mr. A contracted with many catalogue vendors, and would send the Life Magazine for the week corresponding to the birth date of the purchaser. The

business grew and was extremely successful. Managing his businesses required travel from upstate New York to Manhattan. This travel continued and he met his partner, who was living on Long Island, in 1993.

Mr. A had established his outstanding reputation among Expo Collectors and in 2004 he was commissioned to coordinate auction sales of three major World Expo collections for the Philip Weiss Auction House of New York. He also coordinated sales of historical Expo objects from the John Rivers Collection. In 2008 Mr. A published his first book, a historical study of America's first World Expo of 1853 titled "The Lost History of the New York Crystal Palace: America's First World's Fair". In 2010 Mr. A turned his interests to Far East Expos and has researched China's participation in World Expos throughout history. He completed his second book after spending several months in China, a biography of James I. C. Chang, a famous Chinese personality within the Expo industry.

In 2012 Mr. A and his partner relocated their home and collection to South Florida after divesting their interests in New York. Mr. A enjoys gardening, reading, history, and has been a Prime Timer for several years. He is working on an Exhibit of Marilyn Monroe to be opened in the March/April 2015 time frame at the Stonewall Galleries. Always ready to discuss any topic of history this happy, articulate collector is well known to a lot of us. Can you identify Mr. April?

