

For Benjamin Rubin, Front and Center

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NORTH BRUNSWICK —

More than 800 people are expected to turn out on Dec. 4 for a testimonial dinner honoring 65-year-old Benjamin Rubin, one of central Jersey's most popular and colorful residents.

Sports and entertainment figures who got their start or a boost along the way from the diminutive Mr. Rubin will attend, and David (Sonny) Werblin, chairman of the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority, will be master of ceremonies. Also attending will be hundreds of area residents who consider themselves Mr. Rubin's friends.

Beginning as a grocery clerk in his father's New Brunswick store, Mr. Rubin made his mark in New Jersey as a boxing promoter, night club and restaurant owner and a member of the New Jersey Sports and Athletic Facilities Study Commission.

For the last 30 years, Mr. Rubin has presided over his North Brunswick restaurant, The Greenbrier, retiring this year because of poor health.

A Warm Host

To Greenbrier patrons, the ebullient Mr. Rubin was more than the owner of one of the state's largest restaurants. He was a host always on hand—talking to customers, calling their children by name, having a friendly but nonpartisan chat with politicians, suggesting a special dish or dessert and even occasionally joining in a happy birthday salute to a surprised diner.

In an interview last week, Mr. Rubin talked about his business philosophy, one that made people call The Greenbrier "Benny Rubin's place."

"It never bothered me



Benjamin Rubin

when another restaurant opened," he said. "The restaurant business is a hard one, and warmth is unusual. People remember that. You can get good food in lots of places, but the feeling of being wanted—that's another thing."

Born in New Brunswick 65 years ago, Mr. Rubin quit school in the eighth grade in order to work in his father's store and help send two brothers to college. (One brother, Irving S. Rubin, is now Middlesex County's Domestic Relations Judge. Benny Rubin's two sons, Frank and Stephen, are attorneys, and Stephen is assistant prosecutor of Hunterton County.)

While still working in his father's store, Mr. Rubin began promoting boxing matches in the Masonic

Temple in Highland Park. Rock Graziano fought his first professional bout there in 1944. Others who fought there, and will attend the testimonial dinner, are Tony Galento, "Tippy" Larkin, "Red" Cochrane and Ike Williams.

A Night of Stars

Mr. Rubin recalled that one of the highlights of his life occurred in 1971, when a limousine drew up in front of his restaurant and took him to a St. John's University benefit sponsored by former world boxing champions.

"I can hardly even believe it now," he said. "What a night! I even went in to the ring with Dempsey!"

While still promoting fights, Mr. Rubin opened a bar and grill on the present site of The Greenbrier. In the early 1940's, it catered to G.I.'s and industrial workers. After the war Mr. Rubin converted it into a night club; stars such as Bob Eberle, Eydie Gorme, Orson Bean, Tony Bennett and Patti Page appeared there.

Mr. Rubin refers to that period of his life as "my grocery clerk-fight promoter-night club days," since he managed to hold all three jobs for several years.

With the advent of television, the night club was converted into a restaurant. A 15-hour workday and the gregarious warmth of its host resulted in five expansions. And, for a decade, the restaurant boasted the largest banquet facilities in New Jersey. Mr. Rubin sold The Greenbrier earlier this year after suffering a heart attack.

Looking back now, Mr. Rubin is not sure which of his three career — grocery clerk, promoter or restaurant — has been the most satisfying.

"Even when I lugged potatoes on my back, I couldn't feel bad, because things were rough all over then," he recalled. "Still, when you produce a boxing match or a show that gets a standing ovation, that's satisfaction."

"Of course, I've also promoted a few matches that made me want to hide. I suppose each job has its satisfactions and pitfalls, even lugging potatoes. But I guess the best part of the work I've done is that I've always been part of everyone I've come in contact with."