



Brickhouse Tavern will host 'Hey Hey' memorabilia – but no statue

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I was about to propose the Jack Brickhouse statue be moved from Michigan Avenue to the new Brickhouse Tavern on the northwest side of Wrigley Field.

But Crane Kenney disabused me of the idea, for more than the reason he's the bottom line on the issue in running the Ricketts family-owned Hickory Street Capital real-estate management firm. Hickory Street manages the property while Four Corners restaurant group runs day-to-day operations of the Brickhouse Tavern.

All the advocacy in the world would not get the sculpture moved to a kind of “four corners” display of statues on each side of Wrigley Field. Kenney pointed out the things I have never liked about the statue, semi-exiled to a location outside Tribune Tower when previous Cubs management opted to honor Harry Caray instead.

Kenney, also president of business operations for the Cubs, does not like the statue “as a matter of aesthetics.” He does not believe the statue is an accurate portrayal of Brickhouse.

In 2010, the Chicago Baseball Museum helped Jack's widow, Pat Brickhouse, raise money for the refurbishing of the statue. The CBM was included in the rededication ceremony along with new Cubs owner Tom Ricketts.

In my personal zeal to match the statue with the restaurant now bearing Brickhouse's name, I forgot my own criticism in the years after the statue was unveiled. The statue depicts Brickhouse without a tie and headphones, both staples of how countless Chicago



Pat Brickhouse with the statue of her late husband.

baseball fans watched him helm thousands of baseball telecasts on both sides of town from 1948 to 1981.

Jack never on the air without a tie

Whether at the ballpark or at the WGN studios, Brickhouse never did a telecast without a tie and at least a sports coat. Even on hot days at the ballpark in the 1950s, he wore what appeared to be a clip-on bow tie to maintain the semblance of broadcast sartorial decorum of the day while not being so hot under the collar, literally.



Vince Lloyd's family gathers by the Jack Brickhouse statue for May's WGN Walk of Fame ceremonies. The statue will not be moved to Wrigley Field.

Brickhouse discarded the tie in many public appearances once he signed off his final game at Wrigley Field. That's how Pat Brickhouse most experienced her husband in his semi-retirement. In an open-necked shirt, Brickhouse emceed a number of events, including the pre-game ceremonies for the ultimately rained-out first Wrigley Field night game on 8-8-88.

The headphones were another glaring omission. What would a Brickhouse baseball telecast be without him taking direction and jokes on the intercom from director Arne Harris?

The Brickhouse Tavern, spread out over two stories in the same just-opened building housing the Cubs' offices, gets my own four-star rating for ambience after checking it out in a grand opening

a few weeks back. Kenney added my final half-star by not running out of shrimp. Two places in the buffet had seemingly bottomless shrimp and crab legs. Kenney must have remembered the old "media socials" to kick off the Cubs Convention at its former home at the Hilton and Towers in the South Loop area. If a visitor did not arrive in the first 15 minutes of the "social," the shrimp was all consumed, the first of the vittles to go.

I'm sure the food and drinks will be first class long-term at Brickhouse Tavern. The ambience will carry the way. The balcony overlooking the new Park at Wrigley, including a new fountain with colored water after dark, provides a delicious view. Surely countless parties, weddings and bar mitzvahs will enjoy such a vista.

But the Tavern should be home to a nice collection of Brickhouse memorabilia that won't require an off-kilter statue.

Microphone coming to Tavern

"We've got more Jack tributes coming, including his microphone and notebooks inside the Tavern," said Kenney.

A tip to Kenney: contact Harry Caray's impresario Grant DePorter, who no doubt is a familiar face to the Cubs bossman. DePorter has Brickhouse's old WGN tan-colored blazer with a brown WGN Channel 9 patch in the Harry Caray's flagship eatery in River North.

DePorter is not likely to craft an expanded historical display around Brickhouse and WGN baseball comrades Vince Lloyd and Lou Boudreau. As a nice kitschy historical period piece, the blazer will bring back memories to many. Brickhouse wore it both during games and anchoring sports on what was then the 10 p.m. WGN news. The material was so cheap that weather maven Tom Skilling, who also wore the blazer, recalled it could not be easily dry-cleaned.

The photos available for display are priceless. At the Tavern grand opening, one shot showed a jovial moment involving Brickhouse and Cubs manager Bob Scheffing. The photo could be pinpointed to 1957. Scheffing wore a Cubs cap with stripes emanating from the top; 1957 was the only season that cap was used. Brickhouse wore a big, wide-brimmed fedora that was already going out of style in '57.

The CBM's own micro-site tribute to Brickhouse can be accessed at www.chicagobaseballmuseum.org/CBM-Jack-Brickhouse.php

If the statue was a more accurate depiction of Brickhouse, it could complete the historical displays. The reason I suggested the move was not only the opening of the Tavern, but also the impending move of WGN-Radio from Tribune Tower across the Chicago River to Illinois Center. The statue would be an orphan without a living connection to Brickhouse's broadcasting roots. Besides, a slight majority of Brickhouse's career actually was spent based at studios at 2501 W. Bradley Place, two miles west of Wrigley Field, into which WGN-TV and radio moved in 1961.

Ideally, a statue at Brickhouse Tavern would have provided displays on all corners of Wrigley Field.

The Ernie Banks statue is located on the other side of the new park, close to the main entrance. Harry Caray's statue welcomes bleacher fans at Waveland and Sheffield. Billy Williams and Ron Santo statues greet fans streaming off the L by the corner of Addison and Sheffield.

Kenney believes the ideal statues were those of Banks, Williams and Santo. They should have been first ones placed around the ballpark. The sequence was backward.

Caray was unveiled first in 1999, a year after the broadcaster's death. Tribune Co. Cubs overseer Jim Dowdle had gone out on a limb to hire Caray 17 years earlier, so he was motivated to honor a move that worked out spectacularly over the years. But no way Caray should have been cast in bronze prior to the Cubs' top three players, and certainly Brickhouse, who broadcast Cubs games twice as long as Caray.



Cubs business operations president Crane Kenney said more Jack Brickhouse memorabilia will be installed at the Brickhouse Tavern.

After Caray's statue was erected, the Cubs tried to make up ground by placing Brickhouse's "Hey Hey" home-run call in red letters on the foul poles. That move was frequently panned as inadequate and makeshift.

Now, at least the essence of Brickhouse via his own memorabilia will have a first-class permanent place around the ballpark he sold so ardently on "Good Ol' Channel 9." A statue would have been nice, but the alternative is well-recommended.

Pat Brickhouse is truly grateful for this three-dimensional recognition of her late husband at the Brickhouse Tavern.

Jack Brickhouse was a towering giant of Chicago broadcasting, who helped transform the Cubs franchise into the brand it has been for several generations.

Hopefully, young Cubs fans clientele will take a moment to visit the restaurant's website www.brickhousetavernchi.com or at least look up Jack Brickhouse online to learn more about this Hall of Fame announcer and his unique connection to the Cubs franchise. For fans of a certain age, like myself, Brickhouse symbolizes someone very special in their lives and their connection to Chicago baseball.

Like the long-overdue recognition to star-crossed Cubs fan Steve Bartman, to whom the Cubs have given a 2016 World Series ring to absolve the 2003 incident, the team has finally honored the man who for nearly a half century was synonymous with Cubs baseball.

The Brickhouse Tavern will be a special gathering place for fans to show how important the past is to this franchise.



The exterior of Brickhouse Tavern.