To borrow a “Joe Lee-ism,” if I were any happier, I’d be twins! On Nov. 2, Joe and Jinny Lee hosted a book-signing dinner party at Palm Beach National for the long-awaited and much-anticipated introduction of “Gentleman Joe Lee”, a book about the life and architecture of a man I’ve known, loved, and respected for over 30 years. Our small clubhouse was filled to overflowing with people who feel the same way about this remarkable talent and exemplary human being.

Many admirers, including me, have always felt Mr. Lee has not been given proper recognition for his contributions to the game of golf, and this book will help present and preserve his philosophy and life story in the chronicles of golf history.

The book is just the right size for a cover-to-cover reading in a few hours - 242 pages of beautiful photography by Theresa Airey and flowing text by Golf Digest and Golf World's Ron Whitten - but you’ll find yourself picking it up again and again to digest a seemingly simple design principle or to peruse a beautiful photo of a hole you’ve played or would like to play. It’s a simple and straightforward examination of Joe’s life, work, and philosophy without the aggrandizement you’d normally get, given the level of talent and accomplishment of the subject. Ego and self-promotion are not in Joe Lee’s vocabulary, and would not be permitted in a book about him, no matter how well deserved or adamant his admirers. I’m quite sure the book’s title was not so much chosen as it was preordained.

Golf course designer Joseph L. Lee has quietly put up astounding numbers: 50 years as a designer; approximately 250 original designs; about 500 total projects worked on. If this were baseball, Joe Lee would be a combination of Cal Ripken, Roger Clemens, and Sammy Sosa. Many of the creations credited to Dick Wilson, especially in the later years of his life, are Joe Lee’s work from top to bottom, but gentleman Joe would never accept...
Joe Lee, left, with Ron Whitten, senior editor of architecture for Golf Digest and Golf World magazines and author of “Gentleman Joe Lee, 50 Years of Golf” at Lee’s book-signing dinner at Palm Beach National GC in November.

An Original Poem

This is an original poem composed by Clint Smallridge, CGCS, Banyan Golf Club, longtime friend and admirer of Mr. Lee. Clint wrote it especially for Joe and read it at the assemblage at the dinner party.

Mr. Joe Lee, A Man Among Men
Oh what a joy it has been
To spend a career with such a good friend
In the Bahamas with just rocks and trees
You had the answer, get soil from the sea
The stories you tell are funny indeed
But contained within there is a lesson to heed
You always set the standard, a lofty goal indeed
I knew you told me “Always give the other guy a chance to be a gentleman”
But it was my friend that extended the helping hand
So it’s time for special wishes, and only the best will do
For when it comes to special friends, the very best is you!

Clint Smallridge, CGCS

The recent HBO miniseries, “Band of Brothers” swept the consciousness of the current generation as the story of the tremendous human sacrifice by this band of World War II citizen-soldiers was such recognition if it meant taking credit from the man who mentored him and launched him into a career he’s enjoyed so well these many years.

With more than 100 golf courses in Florida, these comments are not news to the many players who have enjoyed his creations, or to the many superintendents in this state who have had the pleasure of working with and getting to know this extraordinary man.

A quote from his book, “One of the jobs of the chairman of the green committee is to defend what the superintendent is doing,” best illustrates why Mr. Lee is so respected and beloved by superintendents. Joe has always supported and respected the work of the golf course superintendent, understanding the difficulties of a job fraught with so many uncontrollable factors.

He once said that had he not had the great fortune of success as a golf course designer, he might have enjoyed the profession of golf course superintendent. How many other golf course architects have had a surprise dinner party given in their honor by devoted and appreciative golf course superintendents, as Joe Lee did in 1990 at Pine Tree Country Club?

Joe’s book is not for sale.

He which hath no stomach to this fight, Let him depart. His passport shall be made...

But he that outlives that day shall see old age...

And strip his sleeve and show his scars...

And say, “These wounds I had on Crispin’s Day.”

This story shall the good man teach his son:

And Crispin’s Day shall ne’er go by.

From this day to the ending of the world,

But we in it shall be remembered;

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers:

For he today who sheds his blood with me, Shall be my brother...”

Though our daily battles are far less rigorous than those heroes of another age, they are no less a measure of our abilities and our loyalties. In that regard, we owe it to each other to be prepared, to be competent, to be diligent and to make sacrifices so that our unique profession lives on in honor. We few, we happy few, we band of brothers. For those whose paths I followed and for those who have walked in my footsteps, living and gone - they are my brothers forever.