**BIRTHDAY SPEECH**

**FOR**

**MICHAEL ELLIS**

Hello everyone!! As we know, tonight we all have cause for great celebration. Tonight we honor and acknowledge a milestone for a great guy, a super friend, a consummate professional, and a real and powerful influence right here in East Tennessee.... oh. Yeah... one other thing.... it’s Chris’ 50th birthday too... (**Wait for the laugh**). When I was asked to speak, on one hand, I was honored... on another, I was a bit puzzled... I mean... what can one **REALLY** say about a guy like Chris??? (**Do you want to mumble under your breath or say as an aside**) .... in **mixed company**? (**And wait for the laugh**) How can we tell the true story of a **hero.**... of **sorts**? How do we capture the **ESSENCE** of a legend that verges on the brink of **obsolescence** (**Don’t finish saying the last word and then say**) .... I mean **TRUE, AUTHENTIC**, maturity and wisdom?? And then I got it... (**either take out from your pocket a little black book or make a very long scroll of paper.... maybe even a long section of toilet paper... hahaha... and dramatically unfurl it and say**).... I could stand here for ten minutes and lie... I mean paint a beautiful picture ... or we can have a reading...and recite the names from his infamous, perpetual, almost **MYTHICAL**... roster of conquests.... let’s see... hmmmm.... Abby...Allie...Arlene... Altavista...Alessandra.... (**Wait for the laugh**).... Say what you will about Chris Coles... and **BELIEVE ME,** tonight we **WILL**... he has his charms. How the heck he hasn’t officially changed his name to LL Cool C is **BEYOND** me... (**Wait for the laugh**). (**HS** **Note... you know that LL Cool J stands for “Ladies Love Cool J??**)

I met Chris about ten years ago. We were playing golf... and it’s safe to say that we got along from the start... it’s also safe to say that through the years, we’ve gotten along great.... we never get “**T’d off**..” I mean we **TEE OFF** all the time.... but you know what I mean.... it was clear from that early meeting that there was something **special** about Chris.... and then, slowly but surely, the enigma unfolded before my eyes... trainer... athlete... golfer... and of course, **LADIES’ MAN**... I mean, honestly, I don’t get it.... he’s **NOT. THAT. HOT**!! (**Wait for the laugh**). What he is... is a great friend... a good guy... someone reliable, dependable, responsible.... always there for someone in need... it’s known in certain circles that if **ANYONE** ever needed a helping hand... like a ride to get out of jail, **CHRIS** would be the one to call... not so sure that he’d help raise bail, but.... **HEY**... he’s there for you!!! (**Wait for the laugh**).

Yep... Chris... high school and college football athlete... paragon... entrepreneur... I’m sure **EVERYONE** in this room has a story... something to say... about this great guy.... and some are even rendered speechless... Not that I should even mention it, but we all know about Chris’ loyalty too... who can ever forget that he married his high school sweetheart??? I have a feeling she might be trying to... (**Is this too much?**)

Yes... there used to be a tag line for a TV show... “There are **EIGHT MILLION** stories in the **NAKED CITY.**..” ugh... with Chris, let’s not go there... and there are probably more like **TEN MILLION** stories.... (**Wait for the laugh**) but I **do** remember hearing about his legendary volleyball career... One friend recalled meeting Chris many years ago while playing volleyball...apparently he was a cry baby at the game.... Nonstop complaining about every call. The entire group thought he was a real pain and, well...let’s say “self expressive...” (**Wait for the laugh**) - well they actually said, in their words, "a real... **YOU KNOW**…" ... rhymes with “**shtick**...” Over the years Chris has absolutely grown on all of us... kind of-like a **fungus**... but let’s remember some of those are rare and practically priceless... at current rates, based on the cost per pound of a really good, exotic, tasty truffle, our birthday boy could be worth upwards of **HALF A MILLION DOLLARS**!!! And he’s all ours!!! (**Wait for the laugh**)

Reliable... dependable... true...that is... if you are able to reach him... I believe no one has ever seen Chris’ full profile... his mobile phone... I mean his **HOT LINE**... is perpetually glued to his ear... he never remembers to put it on silent mode... or even vibrate mode... on second thought... let’s skip **THAT** one... he doesn’t need any encouragement... (**Wait for the laugh**) ... and while 99 percent of the time there’s usually a female at the other end of the line, and it’s usually **VERY** dramatic, Chris is always ready to have a great time... to do his part to set up the arrangements... and whether it’s to coordinate last minute golf plans, orchestrate a great sushi dinner in downtown Knoxville, or set up an evening of exotic delights at a hookah bar with belly dancers, Chris is the go to...

I could spend **A LOT** of time ragging on Chris... and I already have... but, truth... I’ve barely scratched the surface... I can leave **THAT** to his lady friends... (**Wait for the laugh**), but the one true, obvious, non negotiable thing about Chris that’s inspiring, endearing, and so worth mentioning, is his unconditional, fierce, devotion to his kids. Chris may be a character, he may always be up for a good time, he may give us more than enough fodder to tease him mercilessly, but as a **FATHER**... he’s **THE MAN.** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ are blessed to have such a devoted dad and he knows what a special gift they are to him. While most parents may find the challenge of having an autistic child (**Or do you want to say having a child with “special needs”**), Chris betrays his usual bravado as he demonstrates true devotion caring for his son... so, Chris, I can rip you to a point.... and then it’s **ALL** admiration...

Chris, I searched for some birthday wisdom to share with this crowd and to inspire you... I came across one quote that started with “Age and size are only numbers...” and I thought I better quit while I was ahead... (**Wait for the laugh**)... then I looked a little further and found a quote from Milton Berle.... a comedian from the good old days whose reputation is **ALMOST** as legendary as yours.... “I feel like a twenty-one year old... but there’s never one around... “ (**Wait for the laugh**).... I have a feeling with you, Chris, that’s not an issue.... here’s to a great, happy, “Welcome to AARP” birthday... the fun is JUST beginning!!! Thank you all!!