



Late ni ghts, yel l ow checkers

Champaign cab driver Greg Borchelt shares his stories from behind the steering wheel

BY LAURA JASTRAM
Staff writer

The next call comes at 8:15 p.m. from a man at Farren's Pub & Eatery in downtown Champaign. Greg Borchelt maneuvers his Yellow Checker cab through the streets past changing streetlights and stop signs and pulls into an alley past the pub. He jumps out of his cab, finds his customer in a flash and is on his way.

"You headed home?" Greg asks the man. "Yeah, I wanna stop at Pic on the way," the man says, meaning a Picadilly Liquor Store. "They must only have a few of you running tonight."

"No, there is about five or six of us tonight." At 46 years old, Fuzzy — Greg's nickname to many because of his thick silver hair and matching full, bushy beard — drives the cab through the dark neighborhood streets filled with fallen leaves and dimly glowing street lamps. He says he could do many jobs — work construction, even management. But he likes the freedom of driving a cab.

"I don't have someone looking over my shoulder all the time like you do at other jobs," he says.

The 60-hour workweeks can be grueling and the work can be dangerous, as Fuzzy will be reminded in the near future. But Fuzzy says he makes about the same amount of money he could at any other job he would do. He has to pay for gas, but he earns 50 percent of his total fares for the night plus tips. For Fuzzy this could be \$100 on a slow night and twice that on a busy night. Fuzzy can usually make more than most drivers because he has regular customers. They do not have to mess around with calling the company and being put on the waiting list for a cab. Instead, they can get right through to their dependable driver.

"I have a lot of girls on campus I can give a safe ride home to," he says.

Back in the cab, Fuzzy's customer sparks up a conversation.

"Looked like a possum running across the road," the man says.

Cab driving isn't how it used to be. It used to be pretty wild back in the '80s. We used to run call girls in the cab. Guys would get in asking where they could find a girl, and we would just happen to know where one was. We would get a kickback from the girl and the guy who wanted her.

GREG "FUZZY" BORCHELT
Champaign cab driver

"More like a coon to me," Fuzzy says. The cab pops out to a main road and heads toward Picadilly. Fuzzy parks the cab in a front row spot while the man runs in, makes his purchase and gets back in the cab.

"What are you gonna be for Halloween?" Fuzzy asks.

"I was thinking a fat Dracula," he says. "I have the fat part down."

"It's my oldest boy's birthday on Halloween," Fuzzy says. "He'll be 14."

"He's getting ready for all that anti-authority stuff."

"No, he's not really like that, but his brother is."

Fuzzy has two sons — Cody, and Cole, 7. He and wife Angela have been married for 17 years and have lived in their own home for about 14 years. Although he works odd hours, he sees his family a lot. Fuzzy sees his boys before they go to school and for a couple of hours after school before he heads off to work. On Mondays, Fuzzy is a committeeman for his youngest son's Boy Scout troop. He was a Boy Scout himself as a kid.

"That'll be \$12.50," Fuzzy says when they arrive at the man's house.

"All right, have a good night," the man says. "Seventy-eight," Fuzzy says softly into the radio to get the dispatcher's attention.

"Seventy-eight," the dispatcher says.

"Clear for \$12.50," Fuzzy says giving the



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Greg "Fuzzy" Borchelt, a local taxi cab driver, spends some time at his Thomasboro home with his dog Jesse on Monday afternoon on a day off from work.

amount of the ride's fare.

When Fuzzy was younger, he would take trips to Florida to pick up marijuana to sell when he got back to Illinois. One time he sold a bail — 2 pounds of marijuana — to a man who ended up getting caught with the drugs and ratting on Fuzzy. After consulting an attorney, he thought it would be best to join the Navy for four years rather than risk jail time, something courts sometimes allowed in those days.

Once out of the Navy, he began working as an airport limousine driver before his brother suggested he start driving a cab. Fuzzy has been driving cabs ever since. He drives his cab from 5 p.m. to 5 a.m. Tuesday through Saturday and claims to hold the local Yellow Checker record for being fired and rehired the most times — nine. He has driven people as far as Nashville and St. Louis. In his younger days, a man hired him

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CLAIRE NAPIER The Daily Illini

Tony Clements, director of Campus Recreation and part-time comedian, stands in a "Heisman Trophy" pose inside his office at the Intramural-Physical Education Building on Monday afternoon. Clements is a University alumnus and former college basketball and football player.

Age no barrier

BY CHRIS RYAN
Contributing writer

Tony Clements considers himself a song-and-dance man, except he can neither sing nor dance. But he can entertain. The director of campus recreation at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is an in-demand speaker and comedian who has the ability to make people laugh and to convey a message — the very reason he is in Mattoon, Ill., today preparing to give the keynote speech at the chamber of commerce's annual business exposition.

Clements will speak about implementing change in business. With his speech neatly typed out — the funny parts in red — he is well prepared. A half-hour before his speech, he is driving around Mattoon — site of 11 childhood summer vacations to his grandparents' house — looking for last-minute material to insert into his speech.

"I like to ride around and get a feel, so I can connect with people," he says, sipping on a slushy Pepsi, a treat he allows himself just once a month. Suddenly, Clements points toward a bowling alley.

"I bowled my best game ever at that bowling alley. A 192," he says, as he pulls his car into the parking lot of Mattoon's Cross-County Mall, where he will speak.

Clements drives a black Chrysler LHS. It's big, just like him. It's also black, just like him. The driver's seat — black leather — is situated as far back as possible to allow room for Clements' towering frame to operate in comfort. At 6 feet 3 inches and 275 pounds, he needs a large car. Dressed in black shoes, black pants and black shirt, he lifts his black briefcase and gray sport coat from the back seat.

Although the 55-year-old Clements is a large man, he is not intimidating. He smiles often, infecting others with his deep, warm laugh. His large eyes invite conversation. His bifocals tell people he has collected great stories to share, although his physical appearance gives no indication of his age.

Once Clements makes his way inside the mall, he notices the setup for his speech is not what he had been expecting.

His lectern is positioned on top of a riser at the mall's centermost point. Clements' backdrop consists of a Sunglass Express, Payless Shoe Source, Hallmark card shop and a medical supply retailer. New cars from the Toyota dealership flank Clements on both sides while a person in a furry, spotted cow costume walks aimlessly by.

This is not his ideal speaking environment.

It doesn't faze Clements. He knows all about making the best of a difficult situation. One of Clements' favorite memories is the annual Easter egg hunt in his hometown of Raleigh, N.C.

"The families didn't have enough money, so the parents bought a few eggs and just kept hiding the same ones," he says, succumbing to his laughter. "We'd go out to this big park. You've got 42 acres and like, eight eggs. You know, it's getting dark and you've got kids that haven't come back!"

Clements' journey from that park in segregated 1950s Raleigh to the campus of the University was not without missteps, Clements concedes.

He began his education at the University in 1966, where he played basketball his freshman and sophomore years and football his junior and senior years. As a freshman, Clements stumbled academically.

"I majored in sociology, which was ... wrong," he says, the word "wrong" lingering with comic effect after a deliberate pause. "My midterm grades were so bad, my father wrote me a 10-page letter that started, 'Dear Mr. Clements.'"

The Clements' household was a happy one — a place where education, athletics and laughter were important. Raised in the 50s and 60s on the campus of St. Augustine's, a traditionally black college in Raleigh, Clements and his younger sister, Deborah Blanks, developed confidence from an early age.

"Both of our parents were African Americans who went to college and got master's degrees," Blanks says.

Clements' father turned down contract offers from the Harlem Globetrotters and the Green Bay Packers in 1949 and 1951 — the same years Clements and Blanks were born — choosing instead to work as a college basketball coach and athletic director. Clements' mother, a teacher and guidance counselor, had played semiprofessional softball.

"My mother and father were really big on (saying), 'There's no problem too big; no opportunity you can't take advantage of.' It never occurred to me that I wasn't going to do what I was going to do," Clements says.

And do it he did. The letter from his father steered Clements in a new direction. Upon returning to campus for the spring semester, Clements heeded an adviser's suggestion and enrolled in a recreation class

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When the challenge is not enough

Four-time Ironman participant more than just an athlete

BY MAGGIE MCFADDEN
Contributing writer

As you walk into Chuck Smittkamp's living room in Urbana, you might forget that he lives with a roommate. On the wall, where many people have paintings or family portraits, hang three giant posters — each one a picture of Chuck from one of his first three Ironman events. On the far left hangs the athlete at his first Wisconsin Ironman in 2002. In the photo, he is in transition from the swim to the bike, still wearing his wetsuit and flashing a knowing look that the race has just begun. Next is Lake Placid, 2001. Chuck is hunched over on his Cannondale, with a determined look on his face. The last poster-size photograph shows Chuck at the Florida Ironman in

2002, a huge smile on his face while running the final portion of the race — the marathon. He wears one of those clichéd million-dollar smiles, hiding any hint that he has already expended more than 14 hours of effort.

Upstairs in his bedroom there is a small wooden shelf above a slightly larger wooden desk. A red, medal cowbell with the Ironman symbol — a man's head and shoulders — painted in white is a souvenir from Chuck's first Wisconsin Ironman. An encouraging onlooker handed it to Chuck at the finish line. Where many people might have mementos from past vacations or collections of figurines, Chuck has seven unopened spring water bottles with "Ironman" labels strategically placed on shelves across the room. He talks about the bottles

as if he forgot they were there, taking up a majority of his bedroom shelf space. Originally, he says, the water bottles were meant as souvenirs for friends and family — now they decorate his room and spill over onto another shelf above his dresser. He doesn't think he will ever open them.

You might conclude that athletics are everything to Chuck, but that's not what he says. Chuck is an Ironman athlete. He has completed four Ironman events — a race that encompasses a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride and 26.2-mile run all within one day. Yet he's not the stereotypical Ironman participant. He's not a natural athlete, and he's surprisingly uncompetitive. He's not particularly fast in any of the three sports involved in these

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Chuck Smittkamp stands on his Ironman training bike in his home on Sunday.