



# NIGHT MOVES

## *Driving people from here to there on the graveyard shift*

BY RICK LEVIN

If you can envision a city as a living organism, with its heart beating outward from the epicenter of downtown, and if you can picture the crosshatching of streets as comprising a kind of circulatory system pumping the blood of commerce, then you might consider taxi cabs to be the white blood cells of urban life. The analogy is clunky but not completely infelicitous: Cabs do serve a particular purpose and, like white blood cells, they can be launched against certain malignancies. Most notably, taxis are an easy cure for the routinely terminal affliction of driving drunk.

To give a feel for those vampire cab rides I could mention the cute platinum-blond stripper out on Highway 99 who smiled, turned and, poking her preternaturally compact ass toward the windshield, gave us a brief lap dance ... or tell you about the prim, pretty grade-school teacher hollering from the back seat, "I teach our youth and I touch myself and I sing about it and people love it!" ... or the diminutive woman in a short skirt reaching a finger around the passenger seat and dosing me behind the ears with pheromone enhancer ... describe the sour amalgamated uncirculated odor that emanates from five mouth-breathers with a collective blood-alcohol content deuce the legal limit ...

The guys at Go Taxi, a relatively new, independent cab fleet out of Eugene, were kind enough to let *Eugene Weekly* ride along on a few graveyard shifts over the past month, Friday and Saturday nights, just to see what we could see. The idea was to get a different, perhaps enlightening, possibly appalling perspective on unreconstructed Eugene culture, as seen through the windows of a cruising cab, and as heard in the boozy banter of patrons opting to do the right thing and steer clear of the steering wheel. Bless them, I say, every last one.

A city without taxis is not really a city. Look to Brooklyn, Boston, Mexico City: You can't swing a cat without hitting a cab. Even in Eugene, a comparatively small city, taxis abound — especially on weekend nights, when the hordes of impaired, temporarily insane and nearly naked tourists of the Barmuda Triangle cluster up and rub together like limpets, sending out sex flares or telegraphing the mustered-up mustard of fight-club machismo.

Into the weird wee hours of weekend Eugene I rode along in Go Taxi's Honda Odyssey van, twice with DJ Penselin and once with Adam Korinek, and we picked up a lot of people you could classify as something less than sober. So, seriously, if right about now you're starting to recollect in bits and pieces that particularly entertaining talk we had late Friday, just know that whatever stupid drunken shit rolled out of your mouth during the cab ride couldn't hold a candle to the overwhelming respect you deserve for having the common sense to stay off the wheel. Embarrassment and hangovers are temporary, but death is forever.

## **OUT OF THE DARKNESS**

Go Taxi driver Adam Korinek has a privileged perspective on the taxi industry. Along with Mike Spurling, Korinek co-founded Go Taxi some three and a half years back. The decision to bust out a competitive independent cab operation in the midst of a whopping recession seems to have been borne of equal parts wisdom and frustration. When it comes to the sticky science of economics, necessity becomes a contested ideal, but it nonetheless remains a spur to invention.

"Mike and I didn't just start a taxi company on a whim," Korinek explains. "I wanted to work in a fair business. We started in the worst economy of my lifetime. Gas was skyrocketing, customers had very little to spend and many people lost their entire career. How can we ever have any economic recovery if no one can find fair work?"

"It seems like most companies want to take unfair advantage of everyone they can, employees and customers alike," he continues. "Running a fair business is its own reward, and the best thing we can do to fight back."

Spurling seems to share this desire to revamp the traditional model of taxi driving. "I began driving cab around nine years ago and slowly worked my way through just about every position that existed at several different taxi operations," he says. "Through the years I observed that the general attitude toward our industry in this area was very negative."

It was during those years that Spurling began working for the second largest cab company in Eugene. Then, when another company bought out Spurling's employer, he suddenly found himself working for the biggest taxi service. Spurling became general manager, a position from which he believed he could start improving the public's negative perception of taxis.