

THRIVING ON FUN

Retired Capt. Dale Blair breathed in the Appalachian skyline. His thrown-out back was making it difficult to complete the hiking excursion he had started with his daughter. He blamed the injury on his days of professional bull-riding as part of his military troop's rodeo club. Headstrong, Blair continued the Appalachian Trail—the nation's longest footmark from Springer, Ga. to Mount Katahdin, Maine. In the brush under the tree canopy, his "baby" twisted her ankle and started to hobble on one leg.

"Oh yeah, that was a rough trail," Blair, a retired Bowling Green Police Officer of 25 years, said of the 2006 trip. "We were on the trail trying to find an opening to a street. A guy picked us up and took us to a motel. That was the end of our trip."

Adventures like this made the Hill feel like a molehill, which was good since Blair's job required him to walk and bicycle up and down WKU's campus day after day. Blair's family knew him as the "adventurous one," but students, faculty and staff called him "the parking meter man."

Blair, a Bowling Green native, had rich history in enforcing the law. In addition to his time as a police officer, he also served as a full-time animal control officer for Bowling Green in 2004. The 59-year-old initially started working as a parking enforcement officer as a temporary three-month job in 2006, but he stayed because he enjoyed the job and his coworkers, including senior parking enforcement officer David Roach, 55, who also joined him for the "AT" trip.

"We've backpacked together for over 30 years," Roach said. "I've known him for 28 years on the police force. You probably wouldn't want to know what experiences he had in 30 years."

In his sixth year with WKU Parking and Transportation Services, he said he had heard many things yelled from car windows by students and faculty. The most popular choice was the cynical favorite: "Why don't you get a real job?"

"I hear that a lot. People won't stop. They just keep driving," Blair said. "If I hear them I usually say 'I don't need one, I'm retired! I do this for fun!' Sometimes I tell them that, it aggravates them."

He laughed after recalling the experiences. Blair frequently wore headphones, listened to his pocket radio and avoided the critics when walking or riding his own bike to the parking areas.

Blair thrived on fun. At age 16, he started his professional bull-riding career in 1977, but ended at age 24 due to injuries. He met and married his wife, Susie, the year after.

"I didn't ride bulls that long," Blair said. "It's extremely dangerous, but it's also an extreme thrill. I was about the adrenaline rush then, and well, I'm older and wiser now."

According to his 31-year-old daughter, Rebekah Anne Jenkins, Blair showed her his arm when he broke it falling off a bull. "He can't straighten out that arm completely, but that's the only thing that I notice now."

Jenkins and her husband Dennis, a teacher for WKU's summer gifted studies program VAMPY, Verbally and Mathematically Precocious Youth, didn't park on campus when attending WKU sports events.

"Well—I think part of it is because I personally like to walk," Dennis, also the social studies department head at Warren Central High School said. "I don't mind walking further away, like when we go to basketball or football games you might have to pay to get closer. I don't mind walking 10-15 minutes. We don't go in parking lots where you get ticketed. We don't have to worry about all of that."

Blair smiled when he said it was his son-in-law's idea to park further away off campus because he was conscientious. However, he said students should try being a little more conscientious themselves.

Blair's earned wisdom helped him learn the difference between honest and deceitful parking violators. On the job five days a week, Blair said students tried to "get over" when parking in a handicap space with a handicap state placard, most likely their parents', and a standard WKU commuter permit. A handicap placard required a WKU disability commuter parking permit.

"They're perfectly healthy, and nothing is wrong with 'em," Blair said.

Blair said he wouldn't cite if they were disabled, but the fact a car would have a standard commuter permit indicated it belonged to a non-disabled student.

When asked about students refusing to feed pocket change into the meter he had a similar notion. "Students are gamblers. They're hoping they won't get caught. Don't you think that's it? And of course, a lot of the times they don't get caught."

But he said students weren't the only violators. Faculty and staff were just as notorious.

On a Friday afternoon in May 2012, Associate Professor of Music Gary Schallert dashed out the glass doors of Mass Media and Technology Hall to get to his car parked behind the Student Publications Center. Blair stood behind the musician's Nissan with his electronic pad and stencil used to photograph and print the violations.

He was in the process of printing the violation for Schallert.

"Please, don't write me a ticket, I had to get my computer worked up before I go to Chicago," Schallert said while running across Normal Street. He then panted. "Please, I was in here for like two minutes getting my computer."

Blair listened to Schallert's begging and excuses as to why his car set in a premium parking zone after 4:30 p.m. without the qualified permit.

"Hello. I didn't see a permit in your car," Blair said. "Oh, you don't have one, right?"

Schallert wore a WKU Wind Ensemble uniformed shirt and continued explaining while out of breath. He said he finished conducting the Music Hall dedication in the Music Rehearsal Hall and then was headed out of state.

"I gotta go to the, uh, airport to catch a flight. I can't go to Chicago without my computer, can't I?" Schallert said.

Blair wore his usual hat reading, "Kentucky Colonel," moved the stencil against the screen of the electronic pad and then said smiling, "Well, you need to be there!"

Schallert said the expected "thank you's" and "appreciate it's" each more than twice before driving off without a printed parking ticket violation.

"I can't delete a violation once it's printed. But [when printed] it can always be appealed. Any citation can be appealed," Blair said.

When Blair made a mistake on a printed ticket he took it to his office to have a supervisor void it.

"Students don't understand that. Once I write a ticket, they try to give it to me to take it back, but I can't do that, I cannot void it. If I issue a citation correctly, ya know, I'm not gonna take it back."

Occasionally, Blair biked back and forth to WKU from his home deep in the country where he raised his 77 kids—or baby goats. He served as farm manager seven days a week. Blair had raised goats for 25 years and was a beekeeper for 20 years.

Above all these, Blair said there was one thing he enjoyed raising the most—his five-year-old granddaughter, Savannah. He admitted teasing Savannah, but would give advice to her when she reached driving age.

"Avoid parking illegally, so you won't get a ticket," Blair said.



TOP | Dale Blair jokingly tries to feed Coco, his goat, fish food while walking to the pond to feed his catfish. Blair raised goats to sell and chickens, catfish and bluegill to feed him and his wife.

ABOVE | Blair places a sticker on a car parked at an expired meter in Minton Circle.

RIGHT | In the Mimosa lot Blair takes a picture of parking permit through the window of a car. Blair had to take as many pictures as possible for evidence in case the person receiving the ticket wanted to dispute it.

SHELBY MACK

NATASHA A. SIMMONS