

Night shift

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he leaves his motorcycle at home on nights when he's not feeling "refreshed."

None of the four said they had ever dozed off on duty. "As long as I keep moving," said Michaels, "I'm OK."

WSLC does not permit its DJs to entertain guests, but Michaels says he doesn't have time to anyway. He rarely talks to callers longer than four minutes. "Beyond that," he said, "I'm not able to do my listeners justice."

He adds, however, that he sometimes wishes there were more commercials — "to break things up." He explained, "You can only go out and check the news wire so many times."

Michaels sometimes catches a short nap before work, but that's a luxury he can't always afford.

Garrett resists the temptation to reveal on the air how tired he is. "That's a bummer," he said, "People don't want to hear that." Instead he enlists listeners' help in staying awake. "I'll do just about anything to get people to call," he said. That includes soliciting dirty jokes.

Around 3:00 one morning, Garrett offered a pair of dinners to the first person who showed up at WFIR in a bikini. A few minutes later he unlocked the door for a young couple and their bikini-clad 7-month-old daughter.

Because of the competition from cable television, weekday mornings are "kind of dead," said Garrett. As it nears 6, he would like to play hard rock to stay awake. But he has to play morning music instead.

So he survives on "pure adrenalin," repeating to himself over and over, "If I can only make it to 6; if I can only make it to 6."

Garrett said he's "just about the only disc jockey I've ever known who does not just wolf down coffee." Actually, Ohmsen is the only regular coffee drinker among the four. The other three rely on soft drinks. "I always have to have something here liquid," Finnegan said. Ohmsen has another weapon: chewing gum. If he ever fell asleep, he said, he would swallow it. "That wakes you up," he said. Like his colleagues, Ohmsen spends a lot of time with the station's logs, on which he must list everything that goes out over the airwaves, — "even if it's not supposed to." Occasionally an outdated public service announcement slips by: "Then it's memo time."

Because he can't play requests, Ohmsen does not get as many calls as the other midnight men. He nonetheless can count on one drunk or lonely heart a week. And then there are the obscene calls: "Those are the funny ones."

One man calls Ohmsen every morning a few hours before dawn for the previous night's baseball scores.

None of the late-night DJs goes straight to bed when he gets off work. Finnegan often eats dinner at Sambo's, where waffle-eaters see him sinking his teeth into a hamburger and "look at me funny." Both he and Garrett hurry home for "Captain Kangaroo" on television.

"I always try to catch the Captain," said Finnegan. "I can sing all the songs for you. One of my ambitions is to be one of the people who says, 'Good Morning, Captain.'"

Like many people do when they get off work, Garrett goes home for dinner and "a couple of brews," popping the first top at about 7 a.m. As much as he tries to simulate normal life, he says, "your body thinks it's going to stay light."

Michaels says his body has also been guilty of insubordination. "If I stay up past a certain sleep point," he said, "I can't get to sleep."

Often after work, Michaels likes to "relax and listen to music." All music styles are represented in his collection of 450 records.

Ohmsen is the only one of the four who eats breakfast food (pancakes) at dawn, which is really his dinner. After he sleeps, he'll breakfast on steak.

Of the four, only Finnegan has built up an immunity to daytime calls and callers. He sleeps three feet from the phone and rarely hears it. The others sometimes take the phone off the hook to get a full day's sleep. Coming to the door half-dressed and bleary-eyed in the middle of day, Garrett said, "you get some weird looks."

For friends to go in to, with their, who drinking buddies fear interrupting good dreams and don't call.

The four have found many stores that open early. But 9-to-5 businesses are closed during the jocks' normal waking hours, so they often have to stay up late or get up early. Finnegan said there are two people he frequently misses appointments with: his dentist and his boss.

The nighttimers have learned to expect confusion in any subject involving time. Said Finnegan: "I have the hardest time telling it to people when I work." Reading baseball scores, Garrett has to strain not to say "tonight's scores. . . ." Finnegan and Garrett have considered suggesting that days be redesigned to start around 3 a.m.

Ohmsen says it takes him a long time to convince himself that a new day has dawned — or rather started. He seems, however, to have more professional instinct than he knows.

At 12:10 one night-morning, he picked up the phone and answered automatically, "Good morning, WLRG."

Across town three hours later, Pat Garrett unlocked the door at WFIR for Rick Howell, the man who takes his job on weekends.

Howell was in training. "I . . . sleep later and later as the week progresses," he explained. By Saturday, he can make it to 7 a.m. In working up to the all-night shift, Howell said, "Cable TV becomes a real companion."

Howell glanced at the baseball scores. Los Angeles had lost again.

Garrett was talking about his name. He didn't used to like it, but hearing himself pronounce it so often on WFIR has showed him "it's kind of catchy."

"Pat Garrett." He measured the meter. "It's got the right number of syllables to it: Pat Gar-rett. Ted Rogers. Bart Pra-ter."

As the two DJs and an interloper listened to music, occasionally glancing up at the clock, Howell waxed poetic. He was talking about "that gray period," when night is over and morning has not started. A more utilitarian Garrett was thinking about the sunrise that gets in his eyes as he drives home.

Howell rarely goes to bed before 10 or 11. "There's always a certain amount of energy you have to wear down," he said.

He told of being awakened early every Friday afternoon at 4 by his newspaper carrier.

In spite of the inconveniences, Howell prefers this shift's privacy to the station's "busy beaver" atmosphere during the day. He calls his stint "the music shift," because it lacks WFIR's usual emphasis on news and sports. He and Garrett sometimes spin records from their own collections.

"If you were a hermit," Howell quipped, "This would be a great job to have." But he added that working the graveyard shift really hasn't hurt his social life too much. He's learned to live with the limitations.

On dates he is like Cinderella: "I just have that midnight cutoff time."