

Driving Gerber Daisy

By Laura Brown

Don Brown wants nothing to do with retirement. In his 70s, Brown has entered another career: delivering flowers.

Most people look forward to their retirement. Around age 65, senior citizens get the chance to enjoy their time away from the work force and can be found playing bingo, gardening, or even traveling to a warmer climate for the winter months. Most would refer to this time as the golden years and few would choose to go back to work unless they really needed to save money for a winter home in Florida. Don Brown, however, is the exception.

Upon meeting Mr. Brown, one can't help but notice that he is completely bald and completely tan. With his piercing blue eyes, he is also completely handsome. He doesn't look old enough to be carrying a Golden Buckeye Card, and most people are floored when he tells them that he is 72 years old.

He certainly doesn't dress like a man in his 70s either. He loves to shop at Old Navy and nearly every piece in his wardrobe is stamped with the Old Navy logo. He is especially fond of the Old Navy cargo pants and can be seen wearing them everywhere: to church, to golf, to the grocery store, and even to work. He has worked at Something New Florist in Boardman for seven and a half years delivering flowers; this is his "retirement job."

"A lot of people ask me when I'll hang it up, but I love what I do and I love meeting new people. I wouldn't still be doing it if I wasn't enjoying myself. I'm going to keep going as long as I can."

Born and raised in Pittsburgh, he moved to Youngstown in 1966 when his job at McGraw Hill Publishing was transferred to this area. For 42 years he reported construction data for McGraw Hill and took an early retirement in 1999 when a fire destroyed his office in Poland.

"For a year I cut grass and played golf, but I had way too much time on my hands. I needed something to do."

After reading in the newspaper that a McDonald's on the turnpike needed nightshift workers, he thought that was his calling and almost applied. That is, until he saw the sign outside Something New that said they needed part-time drivers.

"I was excited to work for them and when I didn't hear back, I thought it was because of my age. I dismissed it as age discrimination and was ready to move on. And then I got the call."

His favorite part of working at Something New is the feeling of accomplishment. He explains that it feels great when at the end of the day, after he filled 30 orders, that he did something worthwhile. When asked about the worst part of the job, he takes a swig of beer and considers his answer.

“I wouldn’t say there is a ‘worst part,’” he says. “There is definitely what I like to call ‘minor frustrations.’ You know, numbers not being displayed on houses, people not being home, and crappy weather, although sometimes that works to my advantage. Whenever it snows or rains, the old ladies stay the hell off the road.”

Don has a degree from Duquesne University in political science and reads two to three books a week. Oddly enough, he isn’t quite sure how much he makes an hour at Something New.

“I think it’s around \$8. I’m really not sure. Obviously, I’m not there for any monetary reasons, although it is nice to have the extra money. I’m a product of the Depression and that’s why I urge my family to live it up. Maybe that’s why I buy so many clothes. I never had that as a kid. I only had hand-me-downs from my older brothers.”

Nonetheless, he is still known to act like a kid and everyday of his week is usually booked with a different activity: work, golf and racquetball, lunch with his wife, hanging with his friends, holing up in the library or driving his white Mustang convertible around town. He also mows his lawn, which is a little over an acre, with a push mower.

“He’s a trooper,” his son Ray explains while shaking his head. “I’m only 35 and already I have a bad back. I can’t do half the things he does; I only wish I had that much energy.”

For having so much energy and so much motivation, not to mention the wisdom of a man who has seen the world fall apart and come together again, he has remained humble.

“What’s the most interesting part of me? Well, I’ll tell you what the most important part is: it’s being a senior citizen and fortunately I have a young daughter and a young son, relatively speaking, a wife and a dog. That’s the reason I want to stick around.”