

The Port Folio Interview

## Not Your Father's Rotary Club

***Beach native Al Midgett founded The Noblemen with an eye to do good deeds, while pondering metaphysics and drinking beer with his buddies along the way***

By Alexis Waller

Tuesday, May. 15, 2007

**With enthusiasm** and unabashed optimism, Al Midgett, founder of Virginia Beach-based charity organization The Noblemen, could rile up anybody who wants to do good deeds and drink good beer. The Noblemen are local philanthropists who like to party: but, as Midgett, 49, is quick to remind me, this is "not your father's rotary club." The organization started out as The Robin Hoods of Virginia Beach in 1995, which was conceived shortly after Midgett's son was born: you can read his testimony on their website ([WWW.THENOBLEMEN.ORG](http://WWW.THENOBLEMEN.ORG)), but in short, the medical complications surrounding his son's birth left Midgett and his wife in half million dollars of debt.

When their friends rallied to raise money to help pay off the debt, Midgett's ensuing gratitude and renewed sense of purpose got him thinking about ways he could give as generously to others. Born of Midgett's exuberant sense of fun, faith in the world around him, and concern for his community, The Noblemen now boasts 150 active members and a calendar full of great parties that fundraise for a variety of individuals and local organizations. Two events happening at the end of this month exemplify the group's sensibilities: the Heron's Ridge Golf Tournament extravaganza (think tattoos, "Thirst Aid", the Burpenfartzen Brothers' German beer tasting events, and t-shirts that read "I Volunteer For Beer") and their annual Beach Blast at the Cavalier. Last summer Midgett decided to leave his "real" job as a region manager at **WATERFURNACE INTERNATIONAL** and focus entirely on more inspirational activities: he is at work on a book about his experiences and how to serve one's community.

I first met Midgett last month at VB's Bad Ass Coffee on 18<sup>th</sup> street, not far from where Midgett met his wife thirty-some years ago when she was bartending at the Shack and he was working at **WAREING'S GYM**. I picked up my conversation with this old Beach resident last week out at Sherwood Farm, his idyllic (except for those pesky mosquitos) Pungo homebase, and we discussed what turned a businessman like him into a passionate philanthropist.

**When we spoke last month, you gave the impression that you see life as flowing meaningfully from one thing into another, with an implicit trust that things will work out somehow. Have you always lived your life that way?**

No, no! I mean, I've not had a *nice* life, there wasn't really anything special [about it]. When my son was born and I had to make tough decisions, that's when the magic started. ... The doctor told me, right before [my son] was going to be born, "He's not going to make it, and if he does make it, it's going to be *horrible*." And [my wife and I] just basically said, let it ride. Let's just see what's going to happen tomorrow. And from that point on, the world just got *better*. Going into that, there was \$560,000 of debt, and no real way to remedy that other than, well, *magic*. I read somewhere that when you start exercising those spiritual muscles, it's just like physical muscles: the more you exercise them, the better they work. ... I started to pay attention to the world, and read the right books, and it really works, it actually works. It goes back to Abraham Hicks and Law of Attraction and all that crazy stuff, but it all *works* ... [if you] have enough guts to go out there and try it. ... I think about the law of abundance all the time. Last June I just made a decision, you know, life wasn't as fun as it could be. ... With my mortgage and [so on], I have \$7,000 worth of debt a month, simple as that [laughing], and I'm paying that out of my own 401K today, and I'm really not concerned about it. ... I think it's all going to work out just fine. I've got lots of things that I'm working on, ... I have enough money to keep me at bay, I don't really *need* anything.



**DOING NOBLE DEEDS:  
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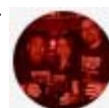
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**You've made clear that having a sense of purpose is vitally important to you. How did helping others with fundraising and networking become your path to fulfilling your search for purpose, for meaning?**

I call it the little voice in your head, you know? After my son survived, I was just compelled to get friends together to do something meaningful. It was simply that: I was compelled to do it. And when I didn't do it, [when] I waited, it wouldn't go away. ... So I called a dozen of my friends to [throw a fundraising party], and [after] that everything continued to fall into place. Twelve people showed up to the first thing, we found out how to do a party, and within two months we found out how to take the money from the party and give back to the community through Edmarc (Hospice for Children in Chesapeake).

**So, parties are an important part of what you guys do?**

Yeah, [that first party] was a celebration: we were all getting together, and we all liked what we were doing.... We've all been involved in organizations where you help the organization do something. Here was an opportunity where we could make *our* money and then use *our* money to go out and do cool stuff. Makes a big difference. And when *men* get together, you've got business guys who are competitive, and they've got egos—so what do they do? They take non-profit to a different level, because they're going, "You know if we make, a hundred thousands dollars, we can *really* help a lot of people."

**What are these parties really about?**

Making money. It's about ... making 75 cents on a ticket dollar to help kids. At the same time, you know, there are so many ways to raise money to help people—but throwing a party, inviting your friends to a party, and profiting on it just seems like a perfect way to do it! ... It's easy, easy fundraising. And who do we wanna help? *Kids*. Tough stuff. We're not the Colostomy Foundation. We're helping kids. But we're doing it *ourselves*, we're not asking the government to do it. We're giving ourselves something worthwhile to do. That's what we are—we're a group of guys, you know, having fun and helping the community our way. And the hell with the PC way.... There's no application to get into The Noblemen—just a hundred bucks. People ask, *How do we join?* Got a hundred bucks? *How do we get out?* Don't show up. Simple as that.

**So, what everybody's looking for—as much as a chance to give back to the community—is to feel truly connected?**

Well, everybody has a reason to be here, but so many people never discover it. If you allow yourself to find it, then that's where the magic is. And the good thing is everybody's not looking for the same thing, you know?

**How do you allow yourself to find it?**

I think it just takes guts, and I think it takes a lot of meditation [laughing], it takes a lot of listening. I wish I could say it was easy, and I guess it's kind of easy now, but I'm *fifty*. It took me a long time!

It takes effort, but I look at life, as far as opportunities, like a long fishing pier ... once I know I've set the bait out, then I can get it off my mind, you know I've done something about it, I've let that go out into the world and if somebody wants to bite on it, that's great. ... You let the world solve it, but you let the world know that you need it.

**How do you find people and projects to assist?**

I want to help the heroes. We'll meet people who get involved with us, and yet they'll have the attitude that they're not asking for help, but they're in a jam. They've got ways to fix themselves, but boy, they sure could use a friend, or *something*. ... That person's going to pull all the weight themselves and hey, we're going to back them. And they go off and not only fix themselves, but in turn teach others how to

fix *themselves*, and it's helping the heroes. There's a lady right now [who is out to] help her daughter [who is very ill]... and it's one of these special kids that's going to change somebody's life like my kid did ... We helped her, and she now calls it a project of The Noblemen: she's raising money herself and giving it to the Noblemen because we're a 501C3, and we keep it in a special category for her to fund what she needs funded until she can set up her own deal. It's easy to help people like that, and I'm really surprised that more people don't come after us. We want to inspire people to be a part of the solution. •

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