

# LET GOOD TIMES ROLL

**BY Stephen J. Lee, Herald Staff Writer**  
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**Column:** GRAND FORKS

***Correction:** \* **The** number for **the** Club Express, a shuttle bus service from UND's campus to downtown bars on **the** weekends, is (701) 777-6548. **The** number was incorrect on Sunday's Page 1A.*

**Illustration:** Eric Hylden, staff photographer

**Caption:** Top: Bob Sweeney (second from right) celebrates his 21st birthday late Friday night downtown on Third Street in Grand Forks. Sweeney, a UND student, says he rode **the** new Club Express shuttle bus to avoid driving while drunk.

Middle: Sweeney (second from right) celebrates his 21st birthday with fellow UND students at downtown Grand Forks bars and aboard **the** new Club Express shuttle bus providing late night rides to and from downtown to UND students.

Bottom: Mike Rocks-Macqueen did much of **the** customizing that turned his used school bus into Club Express, a new shuttle service for UND students to and from downtown bars. Rocks-Macqueen, a UND aviation senior, charges \$5 for an all-night pass or \$3 per trip and says it's a way for students to avoid drunk driving.

Bob Sweeney is exactly **the** kind of customer Michael Rocks-Macqueen is targeting.

Friday night, Sweeney celebrated his 21st birthday by riding Rocks-Macqueen's new Club Express shuttle bus from **the** Sigma Chi fraternity on UND's campus to downtown Grand Forks bars. It was part of a regular route **the** Club Express followed all night, into **the** first two hours of Saturday, ringing UND's campus, including apartments and Greek houses, then making drops and pickups downtown at several Grand Forks bars.

Sweeney got on at least twice outside Joe Black's on Third Street, walked to several other bars in **the** 15 degrees below zero January night, and ended up back home, safe and mostly sound, hours later.

"It was awesome," Sweeney said about noon Saturday in a tired, still-not-quite-right voice, about **the** bus service, as well as his long night of imbibing.

He used **the** Club Express as a way of making sure he didn't drive while under **the** influence, said Sweeney, who is from Devils Lake.

As he was walking down Third Street between bars Friday, his cell phone rang.

"My mom called me. I told her I was hammered," Sweeney said, **the** phone still at his ear. "But she was really happy I wasn't driving."

Launching a business Rocks-Macqueen, a UND aviation student, started **the** Club Express service last semester, trying it out on several weekends.

He saw a business opportunity that also would help his fellow students.

"People are going to drink," Rocks-Macqueen said. "This is a way to make sure they don't drive when they have had too much to drink."

In a UND-subsidized program several years old, Nodak Radio Cab offers students taxi rides at night for a buck. But **the** wait for such a ride often is long, Rocks-Macqueen said. Which gives him a market niche, he said.

A similar service, Sober Guy, that started in Fargo last fall, plans to begin in Grand Forks next month, offering to drive customers home in their own cars. Another Sober Guy employee picks up **the** first Sober Guy employee at **the** patron's home.

Rocks-Macqueen thinks his bus's regular route will get **better** service, all night long. Bouncers, music Mike Ebanks is **the** bouncer and sound man, sending **the** thumping music of Snoop Dog shaking **the** bus windows as colored lights strobe around **the** roof, changing hues, giving **the** bus's interior **the** look and feel of a club. A UND football lineman, Ebanks clearly can handle whatever comes up. "Only a couple of **times**," has he had to play **the** bouncer role, he said. Mostly, he keeps **the** music going.

Macqueen said he's hired four bus drivers and two bouncers for part-**time** work.

Late Friday into Saturday, UND student Andrew Jensen was driving **the** former 65-passenger school bus. "Actually, I drive school bus for East Grand Forks," Jensen said, only taking his eyes off **the** street for a moment to look up into his wide-angle rear-view mirror at his passengers.

A bus for all Rocks-Macqueen bought **the** low-mileage 1987 International bus in Albuquerque, N.M., his hometown, and did most of **the** customizing himself, including installing a chrome pole in **the** middle of **the** bus's interior. It's just for holding on, as well as dancing, as he demonstrates. A full bus is about 35 people in his customized configuration, he said.

He also rents **the** shuttle as a party bus to groups who can legally drink while riding around.

But during his shuttle trips, he discourages on-bus drinking, he said. For one thing, underage students use **the** shuttle, too, to go from home to home, instead to bars.

"We love this bus," screamed Hayley Messner. "We just LOVE it!"

Messner, Kelsey Mulhern and Kalyn Horsch, all 20 years old, grew up together in Rosemount, Minn., and are students at UND.

"We're just riding to other houses," Messner said. "This is **the best** thing ever."

Before they carefully stepped off **the** bus outside **the** Sigma Chi house, they kept raving about **the** Club Express.

"Kids don't have to worry about driving drunk," Mulhern said.

"It's such a great idea," Messner said.

Subsidized shuttle That's what some bar owners think, too.

Rocks-Macqueen persuaded several downtown bars to subsidize his shuttle, to **the** tune of \$350 per month each, based on service each weekend, he said. Bar owners say it just makes it safer for students.

Not all **the** bars downtown have signed on, though.

Brad Beauchamp, an owner of Crosstown Lounge in **the** old Griffiths department store building at 308 DeMers Ave., said it didn't quite work for him.

"Because of our location, he can't stop on **the** street out in front," Beauchamp said of **the** front door access to DeMers Avenue. "It's too busy."

"But I support **the** idea. Anything to reduce drunk driving," Beauchamp said.

Another concern he had, too, was whether buying into such a service might increase a bar owner's liability for what happens on or near **the** bus. Rocks-Macqueen said insurance ended up being much more expensive than he first expected. But he now has \$5 million in liability coverage, he said.

He and his employees take care, too, to make sure everyone gets on and off **the** bus safely, he said. That means his schedule slows **the** later **the** night gets, as patrons move with more difficulty, he said.

On Friday night, he sold 60 to 70 all-night passes - worn as wristbands - at \$5 a pop. He charges \$3 per trip.

"I'm breaking even, which is fantastic," said **the** confident young businessman. "In a month or so, I should be making money."

"But it's all about having fun," he said.

He obtained a \$15,000 start-up loan through UND's Center for Innovation and uses office space at **the** center, Rocks-Macqueen said. Busy finishing up his degree and getting his license for piloting helicopters, Rocks-Macqueen obviously has **time** and energy for other interests.

"I'm putting ads up on **the** outside of **the** bus," he said. "Once I put my cell phone number on **the** outside - (701) 777-4837 - it just exploded."

As if on cue, his phone rings as **the** bus bounces along, nearing **the** closing **time** rush.

"Where you at?" Rocks-Macqueen asks in a voice loud enough to get over **the** music.

"OK, we will be there in five minutes."

Some people have questioned if such a convenient service encourages heavier drinking by students, Rocks-Macqueen acknowledges.

Sweeney said that he felt more freedom to over-indulge Friday night because he didn't have to worry about driving.

Gary Wentz, a licensed addiction counselor in Grand Forks, wants to see how it works.

"You have to have a balance here. You are talking about **the** safety of these people,"

Wentz said. "It depends on how this guy does it. If he promotes high-risk drinking behavior, I would have a problem with that."

He would like to see UND do more to discourage students from over-drinking, Wentz said.

"But if kids are going to binge drink anyway, you're damn right I'd rather see them riding on a bus than driving themselves."

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