

our town

Blue Humor

Making Cops Laugh

BY DEIRDRE GUTHRIE

A gaggle of plastic geese gazes out the window of Pat Gutkoska's storefront on 63rd Street. Not your average glow geese, these specimens are dressed in police uniforms, complete with mini badges, guns, and handcuffs. The costumes are compliments of the mother of one of the denizens of the District Eight police station across the street.

Gutkoska and his wife, Dee, have been running their mom-and-pop print shop, PDT Printing, since 1986, specializing in "printing, silk-screening, and cop stuff." The cop stuff includes business cards, of which one reads "You have the right to remain silent. Now shut the fuck up." Another reads "You have the right to swing first. However, if you choose to swing first, any move you make can, and will, be used as an excuse to beat the shit out of you." Then there's the card showing a horse's ass tattooed with the Chicago Police star and inviting civilians with complaints to give the horse "a big, juicy wet one." And a card that reads "Present this card to your arresting officer and GET OUT OF JAIL FREE" (which the *Reader* reprinted recently).

"I gave a fistful of the 'Monopoly'



cards printed in green ink to some Chicago PD who knew the El Paso border patrol," Pat says, chuckling. "The boys in El Paso handed them out in taverns with the line 'Here's your green card' and got into some trouble."

The Gutkoskas sell lots of cards and T-shirts with grim reaper logos. One shirt says, "Danger's No Stranger to an Englewood Ranger." Others say "Feel Safe Tonight: Sleep With a Cop" and "Dial 911 and Make a Cop

Cum." A powder blue shirt intended to appeal to female cops reads, "I've got a badge, a gun, and PMS... Any questions?" It hasn't been a big seller. "We should have more designs for women," Pat concedes.

Pat, a 48-year-old biker with a hip-length silver ponytail, says the gags match his clientele: "sick, twisted, and fun." He explains that the humor is dark and the jokes cross the line because police officers make their liv-

Dee and Pat Gutkoska

ing dealing with the toxic sludge of human nature.

"Most people wouldn't think this stuff is funny," says Dee, shrugging. But if the storefront walls plastered with business cards from cops all over the city are any indication, police do.

"You have to understand," says Pat, "these guys are poking fun at themselves." He waves at the rows of pig ties, a T-shirt with the sneering mug of a grizzled cowboy that reads "Badges? We ain't got to show you no stinkin' badges," a T-shirt that looks bullet-riddled and has the caption "Our day starts when your day ends," and posters of the Three Stooges in uniform. They're all big sellers.

The Gutkoskas started selling more practical items to cops a few years ago, after Pat learned that District Eight had been giving its officers clumsily stapled, hard-to-read packets of material. He printed user-friendly copies of incident reporting guides, complaint handbooks, and violations enforcement lists and sold them out of his car.

Then he discovered a cop passion

attended swap meets and saw that the most popular items were from the New York, Chicago, Detroit, and Los Angeles police departments. Pat points to a discontinued "Road Champs" model police car that last year sold for \$5; this year it's \$55—\$800 for that year's full set of cars.

Each year Pat creates one over-the-top tasteless T-shirt design, and he promises this year's will be a real doozy, though he won't say what it is. The 1997 model featured a plunger in a toilet bowl that read "NYPD: Take the plunge." Dee says an NYPD cop at a swap meet thought it was a real hoot and bought several for the boys back home, though he kept insisting, "It wasn't really like that you know." She laughs. "I just said, 'Yeah, yeah, just take the shirts.'"

Their 1996 design brought Pat and Dee some real fame: a T-shirt they sold at the Democratic National Convention that read "We kicked your father's ass in 1968... Wait 'til you see what we do to you." Dee rolls her eyes. "The mayor said, 'It's disgusting what people will put on a T-



PHOTOS/RANDY TUNNELL

for swapping trinkets such as engraved glassware, lighters, pins, statues, ornaments, fishing lures, leather goods, and model squad cars. He and Dee

shirt just to make a buck." Pat shrugs and says he thought the joke showed how far the city had come since '68.

Dee managed to turn out 500 of the silk-screened shirts a day, but she still couldn't keep up with the orders. Ted Kennedy sent a limo to pick up an order. Dennis Rodman and officials from Philip Morris and *Time* magazine all had to wait in line. The Gutkoskas heard that the shirt had turned up as far away as Norway and Australia, and they also heard rumors that one of their shirts is housed in the Smithsonian with other memora-



abilia from the convention. "Amazing huh?" Pat says, laughing.

Pat got his start in printing after he returned from combat in Vietnam. "After three years in the army I was discharged in 1971 and can remember going from being shot at in Vietnam to returning to New Jersey within 12 hours," he says. It was a hostile homecoming.

"I still don't like to go downtown a lot," he says, since he has visions of snipers perched atop skyscrapers.

"And he still has to have his back up against a wall in restaurants," says Dee, with an affectionate sigh. "But at least he doesn't have those bad dreams anymore—you used to whack me in the head."

In 1973 Pat went underground emotionally. He was trained in field-radio repair, but he couldn't even get a job at Radio Shack. So he caught papers coming off a press for the *Lawndale News-West Side Times*, where he worked for 12 years.

Dee and Pat met on CB radio in 1976. Pat had one on his motorcycle, and Dee fooled around on her brother's system. She was 18 when they finally met face-to-face at a CB club—Pat had printed the invitations. She found him painfully shy and vaguely macabre in his black boots and leather jacket and long, dark hair.

"Growing up in the 60s I never really foresaw a close relationship with the police," says Pat. "Not so much because I was a politicized radical, but because, like most young upstarts, I resented figures of authority." But over the years he came to admire Chicago's finest for sticking their necks out and

doing society's dirty work.

Now a cop groupie of sorts, he often listens to a police scanner in his back office. He remembers a frantic woman who'd locked her keys and baby in her car at 47th and Cicero and was helped by an off-duty officer. "These are the little things the public forgets," Pat says. "These guys are proud of what they do but can't show it anymore for fear of being branded a macho cop." He tosses a card on the counter that reads "Truth, Justice, and the American Way: CRIME FIGHTER." Below that is written "Life Saving, Marriage Counseling, Damsels in Distress Our Specialty, Open All Night, Bad Guys Caught."

Pat says that people also overlook the tender side of the Chicago cop. He points to a T-shirt that reads "Best in Blue" and has a squad car sitting in front of a twinkling Chicago skyline. It's one of his best sellers. ■