

Alumni Pride: Zibung brings humor to Cubs fans

by Natalie Johnson - Tuesday, September 15, 2009

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Since graduating from the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh in 1999, V.J. “Brad” Zibung’s success in founding a satirical tabloid for long-suffering Chicago Cub fans has been no joke.

In 2003, he started The Heckler, which today reaches 65,000 readers in more than 40 states and six countries.

Zibung, of Chicago, will be among the nine alumni from across the nation honored for their professional and civic achievements by the UW Oshkosh Alumni Association, during homecoming weekend Oct. 16-17, 2009. He will receive the Outstanding Young Alumni Award.

UW Oshkosh journalism department chair Mike Cowling said the self-assured Zibung’s quick sense of humor makes him a natural at entertaining readers in print and online at www.theheckler.com.

“I believe he found a way to tap into the consciousness of the much-maligned Cubs sports fans to create a site where parody and real reporting give them a place to laugh and cry at the same time,” Cowling said. “The publication’s Web site has been ahead of the curve in providing content-specific material for a focused audience.”

Zibung enjoys writing the short, punchy articles that resonate with fans. “It’s the only way I know how to do it,” he said. “It’s a passion project, all done on the side on a shoestring budget.”

The Heckler has been featured regularly by such media outlets as the Chicago Sun-Times, The Sporting News and ESPN Radio. In 2007, The Heckler published its first book, “Cubs Fan’s Guide to Happiness.”

Following graduation, Zibung interned and then landed a full-time job with the Leo Burnett Agency, one of the largest advertising agencies in the world, where his clients included P&G, Allstate, Delta Air Lines and Toys R Us.

More recently, Zibung helped StubHub — the online marketplace for tickets to sporting events, concerts and other live entertainment — found its on-the-ground operations with offices in Chicago and Detroit.

“Brad currently manages a staff of 10 employees who are generally regarded as the strongest staff of any StubHub regional office,” said Craig Cucinella, a senior manager of business operations for the company. “Brad doesn’t ask his staff to do anything he isn’t willing to do himself, and he’s quick to offer positive feedback and support.”

Outside the office, Zibung serves as a board member for the Off the Street Club, Chicago’s oldest boys and girls club for children from economically disadvantaged families.

“To see him interact with the kids was always inspiring,” Cucinella said. “I think they could tell that he was for real and that he really cared about them and wanted to know what was happening in their lives.”

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