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Traffic Obstacles Often Reflect Area's Growth – So I Try To Face Them With a Smile

By James Smith

UCF Forum columnist

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What comes to mind when you hear the term “obstacle course”? Most of us might think of a rope wall, water pit or monkey bars that must be conquered.

If you are competing against someone else or even yourself, this obstacle-course navigation would be timed. Fastest time to the finish line with the fewest penalties wins.

But my daily obstacle course is not a fixed set of obstructions; instead, mine are all different sizes and shapes and move at different speeds.

I’m talking about my 52-mile daily commute to work on four major highways in Central Florida. Traveling from Rockledge to Kissimmee via Interstate 95, State Roads 528 and 417, and Florida’s Turnpike there are a myriad of obstacles ranging from tractor trailers to small motorcycles and everything in between weaving in and out of traffic.

On any given morning, I could come across a school bus stopping to pick up children, large trucks delivering products to stores, dump trucks that have just picked up a load of gravel from a Cocoa plant, or construction crews working on the highway for the day. Then there are other delays to watch out for, such as traffic accidents, heavy traffic volume or maybe bad weather. All these things can slow your drive to a crawl, turning your morning or evening reflection time into a tense time. Instead of a relaxing drive home to unwind after work, you might feel like Dale Earnhardt Jr. at Daytona International Speedway trying to stay with the leaders at 200 miles per hour.

Do you ever wonder what some of the root causes are for the heavy traffic we face each day in Central Florida? Is it because our local economy is flourishing with more jobs, new homeowners moving in, and more students attending our schools? I would say yes to all of the above.

Are there solutions to the daily obstacle course?

There are fixes in the works as we speak. Key roads are being expanded and the I-4 Ultimate project is a prime example of that. What about new-home construction of all kind, new businesses moving to the area and new schools being built or on the drawing board.

These are all positive signs for our area but will they make the traffic problems go away? Not in the near future, but a guy can dream can't he?

There are a lot of days in my travels when I ask myself: Where did all these people move from? Where are they all going to work and shop? What new roads will be popping up and what existing roads are going to be widened?

On the other hand, if the roads were empty, no new homes or schools were being built, or no new companies were moving to Central Florida, what would our future hold?

So, it is with reluctance that I tip my cap to my daily obstacle course and relish the challenges of driving to work on busy highways and byways. Without this hustle and bustle, our daily routines would not be as challenging and we would not witness the reminders of the growth in Central Florida.

I have been fortunate in my travels over the past 3½ years to be in only one minor incident involving some road debris. Just after I started commuting in 2013, I hit a 2×4 board in the middle of SR 528 that another driver ran over and threw into my lane. It happened so fast, all I could do was run over the board doing about 60, the board went under my truck and blew out my tires on the back, damaging one rear quarter panel. Minor damage and only a minor inconvenience.

My wish for you as we begin another holiday season is safe travels from point A to B and not too many obstacles in your path.

Be accepting of a traffic jam every now and then that might slow down your day's hectic pace. And maybe an obstacle or two on your drive will make things interesting.

Just try to face these daily obstacles with a smile and your day will be brighter.

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