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Left to Right: John Reingardt, Dennis Kucera, Bill Valenti, John Hodas and John Fritts

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NEWS OF THE WEIRD

BY CHUCK SHEPHERD

Can't possibly be true

Our litigious, anger-fueled, dispute-intensive society took a break in a Folcroft, Pa., courtroom in March, as landlord Genevieve Zumuda, 77, was suing tenant La Tina Osborne, 32. In the middle of Osborne's defense, Zumuda started

shaking and suddenly stopped breathing, but Osborne interrupted her argument and gave Zumuda CPR until paramedics arrived. "When people are down," Osborne said, "if you can help them, you help them." ■

The continuing crisis

• In April, near New Orleans, motorcyclist Charles Warren, minding his own business in the left lane of Interstate 12, was hit by a bathtub (which had fallen from a pickup truck in the right lane) and was hospitalized with severe injuries.

• Tentatively scheduled for July (nearly two years after Hurricane Katrina forced the chaotic evacuation of New Orleans) is the resolution of two dog-ownership cases. In Pinellas County, a judge will decide, after months of relentless hag-

gling, whether the Louisiana owners, Steven and Dorreen Couture, "abandoned" their dogs as they complied with evacuation orders, or merely left them temporarily at a shelter, which wrongly offered them for adoption. Two Florida women claimed the dogs separately, and have fought doggedly to retain them. (One is an assistant district attorney in Tampa who has been represented in part by one of the city's highest-priced lawyers.) ■

Unclear on the concept

• The Scandia Family Fun Center, which operates a super thrill ride (168 feet high, spinning at 60 miles an hour, pulling 3.5 g's) called the Screamer, in Sacramento, Calif., decided in March that because of neighborhood residents' noise complaints, riders would be prohibited from screaming (and subject to ejection from the park).

• The latest National Assessment of Educational Progress, released in February, revealed that 12th graders' reading ability is at an all-time low, yet their grades for English class are at an all-time

high (averaging 2.82 on a 4.0 scale, up from 2.52 15 years ago).

• Washington state legislators, faced with 10th graders' declining achievement test scores in math and science, are poised to just eliminate the tests altogether (while retaining those for reading and writing, which do not show declines), according to a March Seattle Times report. (Some math and science would still be tested, but only right after math and science classes, when memories are fresher and, presumably, scores would be higher.) ■

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These are family values?

• In Bridgeport, Conn., in March, Fermin Rodriguez, 21, was charged with assault for stabbing his wife several times (after an argument over her alleged infidelity); police said that following his attack, he apparently handed his knife to the couple's 2-year-old son and said, "Now, you stab Mommy."

• According to the manager of BJ's

Pawn Shop in Gretna, La., a customer came in with his diaper-clad boy of about age 2 in April and handed the kid an AK-47 from the store's shelf, instructed him how to hold it in order to "mow (people) down, kill everybody," and told him that "Daddy's going to buy you this chopper." The manager, incredulous, said he took the gun back and shooed the pair out. ■

People different from us

Officials in Apex, N.C., finally confiscated the 80 sheep that David Watts had long been keeping in his home as pets (he slept upstairs, they downstairs). The final straw came when some of the sheep wandered into the local cemetery and munched on

fresh floral arrangements. The town had apparently tolerated Watts' eccentricity for years because of his pleasantness. Said a next-door neighbor, "(Officials) felt like he was (merely) living an alternative lifestyle." ■

Least competent criminals

• South Carolina Highway Patrol officers arrested Howard Fisher, 54, in March and seized 43 pounds of marijuana from his car, after he, for some reason, was unable to avoid crashing into one of their cruisers. Troopers had blocked two lanes of Interstate 95 while investigating accidents.

• Three men, allegedly carrying \$4,000 worth of drugs, were arrested at a toll station on the Triborough Bridge in New York City in March because, between them, they lacked \$4.50 to pay the toll. (They had asked an officer if they could mail it in, but a check of the driver's license revealed it had expired, after eight suspensions.) ■

The classic middle name

Arrested recently and awaiting trial for murder: Gary Wayne Ray Jr. (Oklahoma City, February); Larry Wayne Brigman (St. Paul, Minn., February); Lewis Wayne Fielder Jr. (Laurens, S.C., February); Robert Wayne Wyant (Charlottesville, Va., Febru-

ary). Confessed to murder: Timothy Wayne Shepherd (Houston, March). Sentenced for murder: Jimmy Wayne Bass (Mobile, Ala., February). Re-captured after a brief escape: convicted murderer Michael Wayne Brunner (La Grange, Ky., March). ■