

NEWS OF THE WEIRD

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Small-town mayors

• Mayor Ken Williams resigned in Centerton, Ark. (pop. 2,146), in November and revealed that he is actually Don LaRose, an Indiana preacher who abruptly abandoned his family in 1980 because, he said, satanists had abducted and threatened him, and brainwashed him to rub out details of a murder he supposedly knew about. He said his memory returned

only recently, thanks to truth serum.

• Mayor Lino Donato of Poteet, Texas (pop. 3,500), said in November that he would remain in office despite his inability to set foot in city hall. That building is less than 1,000 feet from a youth recreation center and therefore off-limits to Donato, who was deemed a sex offender in October. ■

Oops

• The Texas Board of Education announced in November that it had made its selections of approved math textbooks for the next school year, even though the group of chosen books contained a total of 109,263 errors. Books of the industry giant Houghton Mifflin accounted for about 86,000. All publishers have guaranteed to correct the errors by the time the books are shipped.

• In October, rescue crews in Pittsburgh freed a woman who had become stuck underneath an SUV in front of another woman's house. She told police that she suspected her husband was having an affair with the woman and had crawled around to get a better vantage point for spying. She said she inadvertently fell asleep

and, when she awoke, could not crawl out.

• In November, a 77-year-old man in Jacksonville, intending to help his daughter, rode his bicycle to Long Branch Elementary School to pick up her 4-year-old son (his grandson). However, he arrived back home with a kid on the bike but did not realize that he had picked up the wrong boy. Said the picked-up kid's frantic mother, "(The two boys) don't even look alike."

• The Rhode Island Department of Health fined Rhode Island Hospital \$50,000 in November because three doctors so far this year have performed neurosurgery on the wrong side of the patients' brains. (Two patients survived.) ■

The fine points of the law

• In November the Food and Drug Administration told Smiling Hill Farm of Westbrook, Maine, that it would have to recall all of its egg nog because it did not list "egg" as an ingredient on the label. Federal law requires the listing to protect people with egg allergies from inadvertently consuming foods that they might not have realized contain egg (even products called "egg nog").

• Jesse Rodriguez, 33, was scheduled to testify in December in Redwood City, Calif., against

the man who ordered him to shoot another to death in 1989, even though triggerman Rodriguez has been, and is, exempt from any prison time. Rodriguez was 14 when he killed the man, and state law at the time prohibited authorities from holding him beyond his 25th birthday. Since Rodriguez went on the lam after the crime and did not surface until he was 31, the state would have to let him go even if he were tried and convicted. ■

Only in Congress

Washington state Rep. Jim Dunn, responding in October to a reprimand by colleagues about unwanted sexual remarks made to a female staff member, said he couldn't recall

exactly what he told her, but that he was "sure it was very inappropriate, because I do that kind of thing." ■

The continuing crisis

• The existence of the 50-year-old, ultra-secure computer protocol required for a U.S. president to launch nuclear weapons is well-known, through newspapers, books and Hollywood films, but according to papers released by Britain's National Archive in November, a similarly complex protocol has been in place in that country only since 1998. Before that, a person could arm a nuclear bomb simply by removing two ordi-

nary screws and (according to BBC News) using "an Allen key to select high yield or low yield, air burst or groundburst and other parameters."

• "Fires during surgeries a bigger risk than thought," headlined a November Boston Globe article, citing data from hospitals in Pennsylvania (28 operating-room fires a year for the last three years) and Massachusetts. ■

Creme de la weird

Mesa, Ariz., police arrested Sebastian Mancilla, 41, in November after a security camera at Mervyn's department store caught him being not too subtle in looking up the skirt of a female shopper. According to an Arizona Republic reporter, citing a police source: "At one time Mancilla approached

the woman from behind and laid down on the floor to look up her skirt. He then got back to his feet and continued to act as if he was shopping." Mancilla allegedly tried again with the same woman, dropping to his knees, but to no avail, as the woman walked away. ■

Least Competent Criminals

• A man in a werewolf mask tried to rob a Subway sandwich shop in Pittsburgh in October, but came away empty as the two employees on duty refused to give up money even though he implied that he had a gun (covered with a paper bag). The employees said the man argued a bit and then in frustration removed his mask and fled, saying, "I can't believe you

won't listen to a man with a mask and a gun."

• Gregory Holley was arrested in Largo, in November and charged with robbing three stores and a bank. He was picked up the day after the bank robbery, carrying cash from the bank and wearing the same clothes that the robber wore, with stains from the bank's chemical dye pack. ■

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