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## NEWS OF THE WEIRD

BY CHUCK SHEPHERD

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### Compelling explanations

Dr. Paul Schum, 50, the principal of the Catholic Bethlehem High School in Bardstown, Ky., was arrested in October on prostitution-related charges after he was discovered loitering in an alley, dressed as a woman, in leather and fishnet stockings and with fake breasts. A local priest, presumably intending to help Dr. Schum, said dressing as a woman didn't sound like something Schum would be involved in, "(b)ut again, we're in the Halloween season." (Dr. Schum eventually resigned, and the prosecutor chose to drop the charge.)

Simple Explanations: (1) Alex Noel, 16, a

finalist in Rhode Island's Great Pumpkin Weigh-Off in October, said his success raising his (1,224-pound) pumpkin was because "You spend all your time with it. No sports. You just come home and be with the pumpkin." (2) Darren Mack, 46, pleading guilty in Las Vegas in November to murdering his wife, and also accepting a judgment for attempting to kill the judge handling his divorce (after first insisting on his innocence): "I do understand ... in my (current) state of mind that shooting at the judiciary is not a proper form of political redress." ■

### Our litigious society

A few days after professional skier Stoil Popow was killed while kite-surfing in the rough winter waters off of Connecticut's Long Island Sound in 2004, his widow told the Connecticut Post that she had "begged" her husband not to go out "because it's January." Nonetheless, in November 2007, she filed a wrongful-death lawsuit in fed-

eral court, charging that her husband's tragic demise was actually caused by the town of Stratford, Conn., which was negligent in not posting warning signs along the stretch of beach used by Popow (of "hazardous and unsafe conditions") and for not having lifeguards on duty. ■

### Ironies

- On Nov. 7, news media reported that New York City's Serendipity 3 restaurant had been noted by the Guinness Book of World Records for having the planet's most expensive dessert (a \$25,000 chocolate sundae, featuring, among other delicacies, edible gold flakes). On Nov. 16, the same news media reported that the city's Department of Health had ordered Serendipity 3 closed after inspectors found a live mouse in the kitchen, along with mouse droppings, fruit flies, house flies and more than 100 cockroaches.

- A 21-year-old man was seriously injured by a hit-and-run driver in the early morning hours of Nov. 3, in Suffolk County, N.Y., as he was walking away from his disabled SUV. Police said that the victim was probably the

same driver who, a few minutes earlier, had himself rear-ended a sedan and driven off without stopping. (And the day before, in Jacksonville, Fla., a 19-year-old man was seriously injured by a hit-and-run driver when he climbed over a barricade after being hit by another hit-and-run driver.)

- Many of today's environment-friendly new buildings are apparently terrible for birds. According to ornithologist Daniel Klem of Muhlenberg College, between 100 million and 1 billion birds are killed each year colliding with glass, with a big culprit being the generous glass construction on buildings meeting the rigorous energy and environmental standards of the U.S. Green Building Council. ■

### Least competent criminals

- Robert Hickey Jr., running from a Hamilton County (Tenn.) sheriff's deputy in October, dashed into nearby woods, fell into a well and had to be rescued.
- Rudy Aguas, 25, running from a Reno, Nev., police officer in November after a failed carjacking, ducked into a building but got

stuck in a freshly poured concrete floor.

- A suspect in car break-ins, running from Miccosukee Indian Reservation police near Miami in November, dove into a retention pond but apparently failed to notice a "Live Alligator" sign, and was killed by "Poncho," a gator well-known to locals. ■

### Undignified deaths

- A 32-year-old man was found dead, stuck in the cat door of his girlfriend's St. Augustine house after she had kicked him out. Said a friend, "(H)is head was caught ... like he was (trying) to reach up and unlock the door ..."
- A 46-year-old construction worker fell to

his death in November in Custer County, S.D., after co-workers had raised him, in a boom, 30 to 40 feet off the ground so that he could try to get cell-phone reception, but the boom's truck tipped over backward. ■

### Armed and clumsy

- Opherro Jones, 32, shot himself in the stomach while allegedly pistol-whipping a man (Honolulu, June).
- A 23-year-old San Francisco police officer accidentally shot himself to death while demonstrating police training techniques to friends at a party (August).
- A 24-year-old man accidentally shot himself in the foot while aiming at a turtle (Massillon, Ohio, August).

- A 17-year-old boy, and 19-year-old Patrick Jefferson, accidentally shot themselves while "holstering" handguns in their waistbands (in, respectively, Pittsburgh, September, and Chicago, August).
- Eric Titov, 22, accidentally shot himself to death while fleeing from police (perhaps caused, they said, by his tripping on his baggy shorts) (Houston, October). ■

### Urban legends come to life

- In Bayonne, N.J., in October, Lindsey Mil- lar's car burned up after a squirrel, chewing on an electric line, caught fire, and its flaming carcass fell down beside the car and rolled underneath it.
- Jacqui Dean, a member of the New Zealand Parliament, apparently became the latest

prominent person to publicly fall for the H2O hoax. A constituent, perhaps intending to mock Dean's general alarm about dangerous substances, sought her help in "investigating" the "toxic" "dihydrogen monoxide," and Dean appeared to support an inquiry. ■