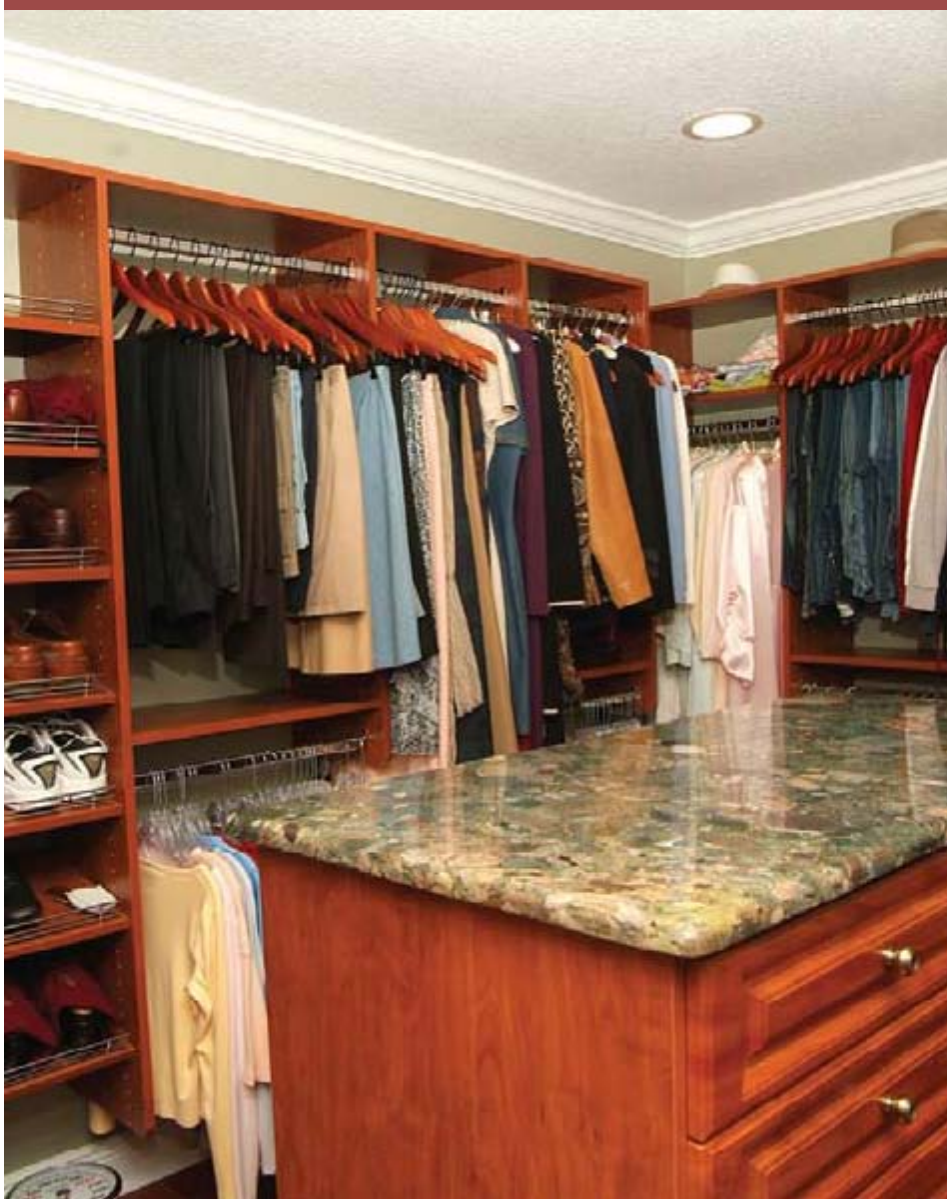


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NEWS OF THE WEIRD

BY CHUCK SHEPHERD
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Doesn't pass the 'smell test'

A startup Massachusetts dating service has the usual questionnaires about likes and dislikes, but bases compatibility specifically on how one person smells to another (straights and gays accommodated). Eric Holzle's ScientificMatch.com tests each person's "major histocompatibility complex" (MHC) genes, the science behind which dictates how one

person will translate the scent of another (with similar-processing people less compatible). (In one famous study, women preferred the smell of T-shirts from men whose MHC was the most different from their own.) Holzle predicts a higher success rate than for ordinary dating agencies, but at a fee of \$1,995 per client. ■

Great moments in maturity

- Douglas Hoffman, 61, was sentenced in January to as much as five years in prison for staging a small-scale terror campaign among his neighbors in Henderson, Nev., to mask his own vandalism in destroying over 500 trees to get a better view of the Las Vegas Strip. At first, according to prosecutors, Hoffman cut down just the trees that affected his own view, but to divert attention, he cut down others in the subdivision and then sent threatening notes suggesting that an extremist militia would continue to attack their property, finally promising

"chemical, biological and nuclear mass destruction."

- John Hayes, 46, a Marietta, Ga., middle school coach, was arrested in December and charged as the person who drove a group of his students around at night so they could vandalize various Christmas yard decorations (in one case, leaving reindeer entangled in "sexual positions"). A neighbor whose display was wrecked pursued Hayes' truck, caught up to him, and asked, "Are you crazy?" Hayes responded, allegedly, "It's just a bit of fun." ■

Bright ideas

Michael Windisch, proprietor of the Maltermeister Turm restaurant in Goslar, Lower Saxony, Germany, solved what has become a crisis for other restaurants since the state extended a smoking ban in August. Windisch opened three holes in

an outer wall so that, in cold weather, a smoker need not venture outside but can stick his head and arms through the holes and puff away while remaining inside (according to a December report in Der Spiegel). ■

The continuing crisis

- In December, the city of Bangalore, India, staged its fifth annual marathon, with an elite group of runners that officials thought would bring the city recognition in the world racing community. But problems occurred, the least of which were the city's ubiquitous potholes and pollution. At about the 20 km mark, the leaders were chased down the street by barking dogs snapping at their heels. Twice during the race, runners were forced to stop and take breaks because impatient motorists were

disregarding traffic controls to reclaim their roads.

- A neighborhood yard sale in Cocoa in December offering children's furniture and toys took place at a home at which two registered sex offenders reside with their mother (though it was unclear where the items came from). A probation officer checked periodically to see that the men did not venture outside, where some unsuspecting adults, and their children, browsed the inventory. ■

Noxious substances:

- State and federal authorities descended on Quality Pork Processors of Austin, Minn., in December after 11 workers contracted a mysterious neurological illness, which apparently came from inhaling the mist that results from blowing hogs' brains out with compressed air.
- New York City apartment house doorman Jonah Seeman was suspended in December after excessive complaints about his bad

breath. His job, said a resident, is opening the door, "not ... his mouth."

- Maurice Fox, 77, said in December he would comply with the wishes of the Kirkham Street Sports and Social Club of Paignton, England, to sit only by the front door so he could excuse himself when he needed to pass gas, which management said had become a problem. ■

The District of Calamity

- Washington, D.C., firefighter Gerald Burton faced suspension in December for disobeying a direct order by fighting a blaze he had come across while driving his fire truck to a training class. A supervisor had ordered him on to the class, but Burton and his partner put out the fire (limiting damage to \$150,000), along with the dispatched crew, which arrived shortly after Burton.

- In December, as the director of the District of Columbia's Youth Rehabilitation Ser-

vices spoke before the City Council on the successes of his special unit tracking down escapees, one on-the-run youth watched from the audience a few feet away, unknown to the director, according to a Washington Post report. (Another 19-year-old ran away in September and was unaccounted for because a female YRS officer, unknown to her superiors, had subsequently married him and was keeping him at their home, according to the Post.) ■

The Weirdo-American community

Authorities in Valentine, Neb., have been on the lookout since November for the vandal who has approached several storefronts at night and, apparently with Vaseline smeared over his nude body, pressed himself against windows and doors. A

radio station called the person "the but-cheek bandit" (although some speculate there may also be a copycat). Asked Valentine police chief Ben McBride, "Who in their right mind would do something like that?" ■