

NEWS OF THE WEIRD

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News that sounds like a joke

- Toronto police announced in February that they had arrested the man who had stolen a backhoe with the intention of driving it to a car wash in order to break down a wall and get at the facility's coin machine. The call to police came from a snow plow that was hot on the backhoe's heels, with the driver having diverted from his route to chase the thief.

- Working its way through multimillion-dollar proposals for naming rights on campus buildings in exchange for donations, the University of Colorado decided in January to accept the offer of venture capitalist Brad Feld, who made a \$25,000 donation to the school in exchange for having a second-floor men's room named for him in a campus technology building. ■

Government in action

- Two Atlanta-area schools began a pilot program in January paying students \$8 an hour, plus a possible performance bonus, to study math and science harder in special study halls (as an alternative for students whose financial need forces them into after-school jobs).

- The Times of London reported in January that the British government, in considering programs to reduce the number of overweight children, is studying one option of handing out shopping vouchers to kids who lose weight and keep it off.

- Two ex-employees of Sioux Manufacturing Corp. revealed in a 2006 whistle-

blower lawsuit that the company had been shorting the quality of the Kevlar in more than 2 million combat helmets sold to the Pentagon during 1994-2006. In February, Sioux agreed to pay \$2 million to settle the dispute. The company did not contest that the Kevlar threading was lighter than the contract required, but the Pentagon said it knew of no troop injuries linked to the substandard threading. In August 2007, however, while the Pentagon was still investigating, the U.S. Air Force nonetheless contracted with Sioux to produce new Kevlar combat helmets. ■

Great art

- In December, Edmonton, Alberta, tattoo artist Lane Jensen augmented the inked caricature of a buxom cowgirl on his own left calf with silicone "implants" in the skin under where the woman's breasts are. However, within two weeks, the fluid went astray and had to be drained. Jensen said some bodies just reject breast implants. "I guess my girl wasn't meant to have 3-D breasts."

- In a Feb. 8 program, the Hamas-controlled Gaza television channel Al-Aksa introduced

a third cartoon animal mascot for its campaign of resistance against Israelis, according to a February dispatch in London's Daily Mail. Following "Farfur" (a Mickey Mouse look-alike who, according to the storyline, was eventually assassinated by an Israeli soldier) and "Nahul" (a bee who was killed when he could not get medical treatment after an Israeli attack), the new character is "Assud," a Bugs Bunny look-alike who does not say, "What's up, Doc?" but rather, "I will eat Jews." ■

Police blotter

- A 17-year-old man was arrested in January and charged with burglary in Tempe, Ariz., based on a victim's description, which included the observation that the man was wearing "monkey-printed pajamas" during the crime.

- William Torres, 21, was arrested in Allentown, Pa., and charged in connection with two homicides; he was taken into custody after a Friday afternoon traffic stop in January, wearing a hooded sweatshirt, pajama bot-

toms and fuzzy slippers with a lion's face.

- A 43-year-old alleged shoplifter was arrested in Newburgh, N.Y., in January with 42 items under his clothes as he left a store, but the items' total value was only \$132.07.

- In December, Wesley Gregory, 52, who works on parking meters for the city of Greensboro, N.C., was arrested and charged with embezzling nickels, dimes and quarters for five years, with his "haul" averaging about \$10 a week. ■

People different from us

James Bowring, 45, told a court in Tauranga, New Zealand, in February that he wants to reconcile with his son, Jacob, 18, despite James' recent conviction for trying to run Jacob over in his car at 50 mph (after making a U-turn and jumping a curb to get at him). James admitted he was upset at Jacob for calling him a "pedophile," following James' having wooed and

won over Jacob's 18-year-old girlfriend and gotten her pregnant. (James admitted that just before making that U-turn, he had dropped off a 14-year-old girl he was giving a ride to.) Subsequently, a judge sentenced James to five months' home detention in the bus he lives in with the pregnant girlfriend. ■

Least competent criminals

- Eric Livers, 20, a wanted man in Cheyenne, Wyo., fled apparently scot-free to Portsmouth, N.H., but could not resist calling his former Wyoming employer to ask that his final paycheck be mailed to his New Hampshire address. The employer called authorities, and Portsmouth police picked up.

- Jeremy Hart, 24, was arrested in Topsham, Mass., in December after allegedly burglariz-

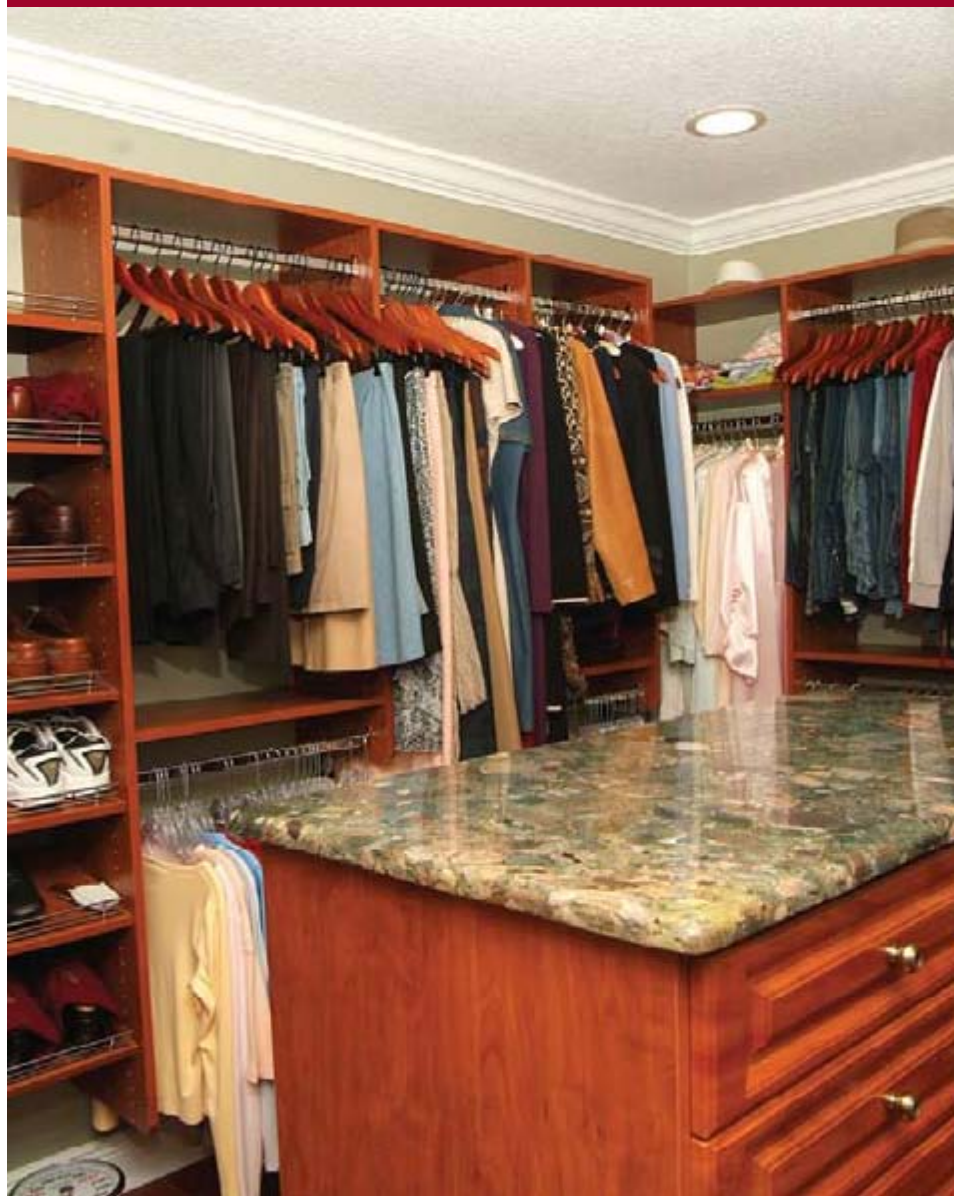
ing a home while the residents were asleep. As Hart was leaving, according to police, he hit a snowbank in the driveway, causing the car to stall, and Hart to become so cold that he sheepishly walked back, rang the victims' doorbell, and asked if he could come in and get warm. (The residents, aware that Hart had just been in their house, had already called police.) ■

Recurring themes

Many inmates file lawsuits over the allegedly poor quality of prison food, but noteworthy was the one recently filed by Missouri inmate Norman Lee Toler (serving 10 years for statutory rape), demanding kosher food as required by his devout Judaism, even though, in a pre-

vious prison stint, he was a notorious Adolf Hitler sympathizer with Nazi tattoos. He also amassed white supremacist photos and literature. Said a spokesman for the state attorney general, "We have serious factual doubts about ... his sincerity." ■

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