

## NEWS OF THE WEIRD

BY CHUCK SHEPHERD

DISTRIBUTED BY UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

## Questionable judgments

► It seemed like an obviously good decision by the Toronto Transit Commission in 2006 to curb counterfeiting of its aluminum coins and paper tickets by phasing in larger metal-alloy tokens as substitutes. By earlier this year, when the tokens had completely replaced the lighter coins and paper, the commission realized that its fare-sorting room was beginning to crack at the foundations because the tokens to be counted weigh about 60 tons more than pre-2006 aluminum and paper. A commission spokesman told the Toronto Sun in November that engineers were working on a solution.

► In September, Atlanta-area educator Phillippa Faust, working on a \$455,000 annual federal sex education grant, offered a \$10,000 contest prize for an engaged local couple who had so far abstained from sex and would continue to do so until the wedding. (Any sex would be "risky behav-

ior," said Faust, but worst of all would be living together before marriage, which is a "set up for the kill.") However, despite the large population of the area, she had no takers, and as the deadline approached, she told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution that she even considered opening the contest to engaged couples who had had sex but regretted it. Ms. Faust eventually had to scrap the contest altogether because of conflicting federal grant rules.

► In November, a judge in Dublin, Ga., sentenced Rico Todriquez Wright, 25, to at least 20 years in prison for the 2006 shooting of Chad Blue, who had told police initially that he didn't know who had shot him. Mr. Blue later heard a thug-life song on CD, "Hitting Licks for a Living," in which rap singer Mr. Wright brags, "Chad Blue knows how I shoot" and realized Mr. Wright was the one who shot him that night. ■

## People different from us

For 15 years, Eduardo Arrocha, 46, was different from us, as "Eak the Geek," the "Pain-Proof Man" at New York's Coney Island Sideshow, where he lay on nails, walked on glass, ate lightbulbs, and put his tongue in a mousetrap. However, in 2007, he traded everything in for a spot in the class at Thomas M. Cooley

Law School in Lansing, Mich., where he is in his second year ("from one freak show to another," he said, "it's the most bizarre thing I've ever done in my life"). Job interviews may be tough because a three-piece suit will hide only his chest-to-toe tattoos; recruiters can't miss the stars and planets that cover his face. ■

## Least competent criminals

► A 49-year-old Leavenworth, Kan., man was hospitalized in November after (according to police) using a front-end loader to pluck an ATM from the Frontier Credit Union. He was hurt when he drove to the edge of a 50-foot embankment and tried to drop the ATM, imagining that the fall would break it open, but instead, he, the loader, and the ATM all crashed to the bottom.

► British Muslim convert Nicky Reilly,

22, pleaded guilty in October in Exeter, England, to attempted terrorism for detonating a homemade nail bomb in the Giraffe restaurant. The plan failed when Reilly triggered the bomb in the men's room, intending to take it into the dining area, but then could not unlock the men's room door to get out. (His lawyer called him perhaps the "least cunning" person ever to be charged with terrorism in Britain.) ■

## Checkers guru checks out

One of the world's best-known strategists on the game of checkers passed away in November. Richard Fortman was Illinois state champion six times, and in the 1970s and 1980s published a seven-volume handbook on rules and tactics. Many people now considering the game would be astonished to know that, as in chess, there are masters and grandmasters, and interna-

tional rankings, that experts actually study historical opening moves and endgames, and that some play, move-by-move, via the U.S. Mail. A New York Times obituary noted that Mr. Fortman played as many as 100 games simultaneously, and won games blindfolded. Until the end, according to his daughter, Mr. Fortman spent "hours each day" playing checkers online. ■

## Cultural diversity

► Serbians, who have previously, bafflingly, constructed large, reverential public statues of martial-arts actor Bruce Lee and movie characters Tarzan and Rocky Balboa, built one of reggae musician Bob Marley in August in the village of Banatski Sokolac. Also planned was a statue of British singer Samantha Fox, but that project fell through. One Serbian artist who helped raise money for the Rocky statue told The New York Times, "My generation can't find role models (at home) so we have to look elsewhere."

► The Gorani, a small group of Muslims

scattered through the former Yugoslavia, lead mostly unremarkable lives, except for their singular distinction: Every five years, they gather in southern Kosovo for Sunet, a festival of mass-circumcision of toddlers, with a history tracing back centuries. Last year, 130 boys born since the previous Sunet were circumcised, without anesthetic, by Zylfekar Shishko, 70, for a small fee. Many Gorani are apprehensive about 2012, according to an October dispatch in Germany's Der Spiegel, because Shishko is 70 years old and the only skilled Gorani circumciser. ■

## Recurring themes

As animal hoarding goes, the 30 seized from Darlene Gardner's double-wide trailer home in Kootenai County, Idaho, last year weren't particularly noteworthy, even though two of them, deer, were living inside, each in its own bedroom. Authorities released the deer and other healthy animals into the wild and euthanized

the rest, and Gardner's husband pleaded guilty to one animal cruelty charge. However, in November, Darlene filed a \$2 million federal lawsuit against the county's "jack-booted thugs" who, acting without a search warrant, she said, had "killed my babies," referring to the animals that "were my life and my family." ■


**ADVANCE SPA**
[www.AdvanceSolar.com](http://www.AdvanceSolar.com)

Lowest Prices and the Best Quality.

Enjoy More  
Quality Time  
AT HOME  
with Family  
and Friends



RELAX and  
enjoy the therapeutic effects of  
warm, pulsing water

100%  
Financing

**HOLIDAY SALE**

Going on NOW!

Up to \$1000 OFF  
No payments until 2010

Don't Be Fooled...

We have the **BEST PRICES**  
in Town!

Call **239.939.7446** Today!

Voted BEST place to buy 12 years in a row!

**GO SOLAR  
AND SAVE!**

**Never Pay for Hot Water!**

Install a \$4500 Solar Water Heating System for as little as \$2150\* and you'll save up to 30% on your electric bill!



It's one  
small panel  
on your roof.

**Heat Your Pool!**

A solar system is the most efficient and cost effective way to heat your pool. You'll be able to stay home more, enjoy your pool, and great times with your family and friends.

**Or Install a Photovoltaic System  
for your Home or Business!**

PV is the most energy productive of all solar products. It's your best insurance against soaring electric rates. In fact, under the recent "Net Metering" law, the extra electricity you produce is "sold" back to the utility company and a dollar-for-dollar amount is credited to your account!



Call **239.939.7446** Today!

[www.AdvanceSolar.com](http://www.AdvanceSolar.com)

\*for information about incentives available and financing options.


**ADVANCE SOLAR**  
Commercial & Residential Solar Energy & Spas  
THE investment you CAN'T afford NOT to make!

Lic. #CVC056664