

## NEWS OF THE WEIRD

BY CHUCK SHEPHERD

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## One industry that needs no stimulus

► Drug officials in California's Mendocino, Humboldt and Trinity counties (north of San Francisco) estimated in January that two-thirds of the area's economy may be based on illegal marijuana farming (illegal under federal law, but permitted for medical use by the state). One federal agent told MSNBC, "Nobody produces any better marijuana than (they) do right here."

► In January, the director of the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime acknowledged that during the bleak banking days of September and October 2008, with panic in the economy over the shortage of cash, often the main source available to some banks was drug dealers' steady deposits of money to be laundered. ■

## Community Property

► As part of a highly contentious New York divorce, surgeon Richard Batista, who in good times had donated a kidney to his wife, demanded in January that she either give it back or compensate him with \$1.5 million in consideration of the rarity of his kidney match.

► Also in January, Thomas Rowley, 28,

went on trial in Victorville, Calif., for his allegedly more direct approach two years ago after he and his girlfriend split. According to prosecutors, Rowley said that since he had paid for her breast implants, he felt entitled to recover them, allegedly by carving them out of her body (and consequently was charged with attempted murder). ■

## Recurring themes

► A Prosecutor's Worst Nightmare: At a dramatic moment in the November trial of a bus driver accused of rape in Edmonton, Alberta, the prosecutor asked the victim on the witness stand to look around the courtroom and identify her attacker. The victim adjusted her glasses and scanned the room, but looked past

the defense table and pointed confidently to a man in the gallery later identified as a Canadian Broadcasting Corp. reporter, who in fact had nothing to do with the rape. (The judge allowed her a second chance, based on the volume of other evidence against the defendant, and she correctly identified him.) ■

## The continuing crisis

► Episcopal priest Gregory Malia, 43, of Wilkes-Barre, Pa., buys top-dollar champagne at New York City nightclubs, even leaving five-figure tips and treating his favorite waitresses to shopping sprees, according to a December New York Daily News report. Mr. Malia (who is a hemophiliac and owns a pharmacy devoted to blood-disorder medicine) said, "I work hard. I make good money. How I spend it, that is my business." Waitresses interviewed by the Daily News said "Father Greg" is a sweetheart, never doing anything inappropriate, but exceedingly generous, whether alone or with business clients. Said one waitress,

"A bad night for him is (a tip of) \$5,000."

► Forbes magazine reported in December that state authorities were investigating Beverly Hills, Calif., plastic surgeon Alan Bittner over his claim that he had created diesel fuel for his and his girlfriend's SUVs out of liposuctioned fat from his patients. California law is said to prohibit using medical waste for such a purpose, but Bittner's claims came to light in patients' lawsuits over liposuction treatments, quoting Bittner as bragging about the biodiesel. Bittner wrote on one Web page (no longer online), "The vast majority of my patients request that I use their fat for fuel, and I have more fat than I can use." ■

## Bright ideas

Walter Tessier was charged with one of the pettiest of petit larceny counts in January as sheriff's deputies in Amsterdam, N.Y., said he tried to defraud a Price Chopper store. Tessier had purchased a \$10.99 lobster but returned it, claiming that it had turned "bad," and the store

allowed him some crab meat in exchange, but employees discovered that the "lobster" was only its empty, carefully reconstructed shell that made it appear whole. Mr. Tessier then ran from the store but was arrested later at his home, where he had just finished the crab meat. ■

## Family values

The sheriff in El Dorado, Kan., asked in January for help from the public in locating a missing boy named Adam. According to the sheriff, Adam's parents, Doug and Valerie Herrman, only recent-

ly reported him missing, even though they had not seen him since he ran away in 1999, when he was 11. The Herrmans' attorney said that his clients were nonetheless "very worried about him." ■

## Life imitates the Three Stooges

In January, inmates Regan Reti, 20, and Tiranara White, 21, who had been booked separately for different crimes on New Zealand's North Island and were handcuffed together for security at Hastings District Court, dashed out of the building and ran for their freedom. However, when they encountered

a streetlamp in front of the courthouse, one man went to the right of it and the other to the left, and they slammed into each other, allowing jailers to catch up and re-arrest them. (A courthouse surveillance camera captured the moment, and the video has been a worldwide sensation.) ■


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