

NEWS OF THE WEIRD

BY CHUCK SHEPHERD

DISTRIBUTED BY UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

The new 'Beetle Bailey?'

University of California researchers, on a Pentagon contract, announced success at rigging a live flower beetle with electrodes and a radio receiver to enable scientists to control the insect's flight remotely. Pulses sent to the bug's muscles or optic lobes can command it to take off, turn left or right, or hover, according to a report in MIT Technology Review. The

insect's "large" size (up to a whopping four inches in length) would enable it to also carry a camera, giving the beetle military uses such as surveillance or search and rescue. The researchers admired the native flight-control ability of the beetle so much that they abandoned developing robot beetles (which required trying to mimic nature). ■

Why they go postal

An official of the National Association of Letter Carriers in Buffalo, N.Y., said that it would challenge the Postal Service's threatened suspension of a carrier who was using sidewalks to

get from house to house this winter instead of walking across ice-packed, deep-snow-drift yards. Cutting across yards is required by Postal Service rules in order to speed up deliveries. ■

Leading economic indicators

► At Tokyo's first fish auction of 2009, the upscale Kyubey restaurant and the more moderate Itamae Sushi dining chain jointly purchased a single, 280-pound bluefin tuna for the equivalent of about \$104,000. Kyubey said it would cut its half into slivers priced at about \$22 each, while the popular Itamae planned to offer smaller, more affordable slivers.

► In Hong Kong, according to a Wall Street Journal report, when a feng shui master speaks on the economy, investors listen closely (especially in view of the mess quantitative analysis has made of things). Alion Yeo, an expert on the Chinese system of beliefs in stars, geography and the location of objects, told a group of about 170 recently that 2009 would be dismal because the U.S. economy is now in the hands of a president and a secretary of the Treasury

who were both born in a Year of the Ox (1961), of which 2009 is another (and which has already started frighteningly with both a solar eclipse and a lunar eclipse).

► Some laid-off workers may be desperate to exhibit their work skills at any available job, but February news reports highlighted two government bureaucrats who draw \$250,000 a year between them yet have been prevented from doing a stitch of work for, in one case, six years, and in the other, 18 months. Randall Hinton is nominally the chief of investigations for the New York State Insurance Fund but was ostracized by his supervisors in 2002 and has taken home his \$93,000 a year for zero work ever since. U.S. Labor Department official Bob Whitmore earns \$150,000 but has had no work to do since July 2007 due to a clash with his supervisors. ■

Scenes of the surreal

► Allahmanamjad Barbel, 21, sought help in February at the police station in Barnstable, Mass., after his sister playfully put handcuffs on him at a birthday party and couldn't get them off. Police removed them and then, after running his name through the computer, discovered several outstanding warrants and immediately re-cuffed him.

► Doctoral student Daniel Bennett filed a lawsuit against Britain's Leeds University

in February because custodians had mistakenly thrown out research that he had been working with for the last seven years. Mr. Bennett is studying the rare Butaan lizard of the Philippines and over the years, to examine its diet, had painstakingly sifted through jungle dirt to gather over 70 pounds of its feces, which Bennett believes is worth far more than the (\$720) Leeds has offered him. ■

The entrepreneurial spirit

► A coin-operated self-service dog-washing machine ("self" meaning the dog's owner, not the dog) has been introduced in a half-dozen carwashes in the United States recently, at \$10 for 10 minutes, according to a January report on one such franchise in Stuart, Fla. The "K9000" is a 3-foot-high, walk-in shower area (or push-in, for reluctant dogs) with an open top, has six separate wash cycles, conditioner and flea-and-tick options, and adjustable water pressure and dryer settings.

► At Mannerspielplatz ("Men's Playground") near Kassel, Germany, testosterone-fueled office workers can get in touch with their "inner ditchdigger" (according to a January Wired magazine report) and frolic all day long on 29-ton backhoes, 32-ton front-end loaders, jackhammers and various other big, loud vehicles for an admission fee of about \$280 a day. At the Men's Playground, the owner said, "We fulfill men's dreams." ■

Weird biology

Princeton University scientists, reporting in January on research in Peru, said they observed aggressive, carnivorous behavior for the first time among dung beetles, which decapitated and ate mil-

lipedes. Dung beetles were not known previously to be fussy eaters (except for a 2006 study in which they seemed to prefer horse dung to camel dung or sheep dung). ■

Least competent criminals

► In February, David Hampton, 23, was charged in Charlotte County, Fla., with robbing a BP gas station and became the latest such robber to run out of gas in his getaway car even though minutes earlier, obviously, he had been present at a gas station.

► In Marseille, France, in January, a

21-year-old man became the latest bank burglar with an ambitious plan and a mediocre sense of direction, as he drilled through the outside wall of a branch of Banque Populaire but missed the room with the safe deposit boxes and wound up instead in a restroom. ■


ADVANCE SPA
www.AdvanceSolar.com
 Lowest Prices and the Best Quality.

Enjoy More
Quality Time
AT HOME
with Family
and Friends



Up to \$1000 Off!
100% Financing
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!



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

*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