

NEWS OF THE WEIRD

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The new waterboarding

In April, the district attorney in Vilas County, Wis., announced that he was seeking volunteers for a forensic test to help his case against Douglas Plude, 42, who is scheduled to stand trial soon for the second time in the death of his wife. The volunteers must be female, about

5-foot-8 and 140 pounds, and will have to stick their heads into a toilet bowl and flush. Plude is charged with drowning his wife in a commode, but his version (which the prosecutor will try to show is improbable) is that his wife committed suicide by flushing herself. ■

Why government workers get a reputation

In April, accounting clerk James Kauchis made a formal complaint to the personnel office of the county Department of Social Services in Binghamton, N.Y., demanding that he be compensated for a recent interrupted lunch hour. Kauchis had missed lunch when DSS offices were

locked down as police secured the neighborhood surrounding the site of the April 3 massacre in which a gunman killed 13 people and then himself. Although DSS had pizza and beverages brought in during the siege, Kauchis felt that wasn't as good as a regular lunch hour. ■

Ironies

► On April 8, the New Hampshire House of Representatives debated a controversial bill to outlaw discrimination against "transgenders" (those born of one sex but who identify as the other), and the legislation passed by one vote. Coincidentally, April 8 was the state's Tartan Day, and by tradition, male lawmakers of Scottish ancestry wore kilts to work. Thus, some opponents of giving greater protection to "men" who wear skirts were men who were that day wearing "skirts." (In any event, the state Senate subsequently rejected the bill.)

► Environmental activists Raoul Surcouf and Richard Spink set sail from Bristol, England, in May on a 40-foot boat outfitted with solar panels and a wind turbine to attempt the first carbon-neutral crossing of Greenland's polar ice cap (a journey being monitored eagerly online in Bristol by 25,000 schoolchildren). However, 400 miles off the coast of Ireland, hurricane-force winds destroyed the boat, and the crew was lucky to be rescued by a nearby ship, which was a tanker carrying 680,000 barrels of crude oil. ■

Almost no longer weird

► In Los Angeles on March 29, hit-and-run drivers killed two pedestrians: an 18-year-old female college student and, hours later, a 55-year-old Guatemalan-American construction worker. As is not unusual, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, the LAPD went into massive "overdrive" to find the woman's killer but handed the other

homicide off to "a lone detective with little more to go on than hope."

► On April 25, in Washington, D.C., the murder of a black teenager was reported in two sentences of that day's *Washington Post* while nearly 10 times the space was devoted to the colonoscopy of a panda at the city's National Zoo. ■

Compelling explanations

► Neal Horsley, running for governor of Georgia in the 2010 election on a platform encouraging the quaint Peach State legal theory of "nullification" (i.e., that the state can override the U.S. Constitution in certain instances), is principally known as a staunch foe of abortion who once posted a "hit list" of doctors. However, Horsley is also celebrated for a 2005 television interview with Fox News' Alan Colmes, in which Horsley described his childhood: "When you grow up on a farm in Georgia, your first girlfriend is a mule." To a skeptical Colmes, Horsley added, "(Y)ou (city)

people are so far removed from reality... Welcome to domestic life on the farm."

► A month after her client was accused of a March attempted murder, attorney Frances Hartman spoke up for him to a reporter. "(My client) is an exemplary young man," said Hartman, describing fourth-year Camden, N.J., medical student Brett Picciotti, 26, who was charged with shoving his girlfriend off a second-story balcony, but who denied that he pushed her. "This is an aberrational charge," Hartman said. "I think there's an explanation. I'm just not prepared to give it to you right now." ■

Rammed for a good reason

► Lorena Alvarez was charged with aggravated battery in April in Lake Worth, Fla., after allegedly, angrily crashing her car into her boyfriend's pickup truck, thus endangering her two kids, ages 7 and 1, who were with her. She explained to police that her boyfriend was about to drive off drunk and hitting him was the best way to prevent danger to other motorists.

► John Angeline was charged with fatally running over gas station attendant Haeng Soon Yang in Mossy Rock, Wash., in April after she tried to stop him from leaving without paying for \$34 in fuel. Angeline, captured nearby, explained to police that he had run over the woman because she looked like she was about to "cast a spell" on him. ■

Least competent criminals

► In April in Arnold, Mo., police arrested a suspected shoplifter trying to leave a Schnucks store with unpaid-for merchandise. She aroused suspicion from security personnel only because she was attempting to exit through an automatic "enter" door and was slow to figure out the problem and loud in expressing her frustration.

► Nathaniel Johnson, 19, was arrested in March in Tampa on burglary charges when police produced solid evidence of his presence in a neighborhood that had reported several break-ins. Johnson was revealed to be at each crime scene because he was traced by the ankle monitor he was wearing from a previous court appearance. ■

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