

O P I N I O N

WEIRD SIDE

- News of the Weird, by Chuck Shepherd

The Lillehammer Olympic Organizing Committee in Norway told visiting dignitaries that its employees are training with "smile holders" in order not to look dour during the Games. A smile holder is a device that fits on the wearer's head, with clips that grasp the corners of the wearer's mouth; it can be adjusted, by pulling a strap, to go from slight grin to gleeful smile.

Tacky, Tacky

-In November a company called the National Historical Mint in Boca Raton, Fla., hired Earl Ruby (brother of Lee Harvey Oswald's killer) to fire 100 bullets from his brother's gun into a drum of water. The bullets will be mounted on plaques commemorating the death of John F. Kennedy and sold for around \$2,500 each.

-*The New York Times* reported in July that the Saddam Art Center in downtown Baghdad featured a new display of more than 40 larger-than-life paintings of Saddam Hussein, in the midst of growing nationwide demand for Saddam portraits. All public buildings in Iraq already feature large, hand-painted portraits of Saddam.

-In June, Michael Boland, 45, founder of the Commonwealth School of Law in Lowell, Mass., was convicted of arson for a 1989 incident in which he ordered his bodyguard to set fire to the library in the rival Massachusetts School of Law in Andover.

-The University of Tennessee *Daily Beacon* reported in March on a disturbance at the C.E. Brehm Animal Sciences building in which one senior secretary accused another of assault. According to the paper, one of the women had grabbed the other's time sheet after a dispute, and in an ensuing struggle, the abductor "made facial gestures at (the woman), stuck her tongue out at her, and called her a liar," and allegedly followed that up with a shove.

The Weirdo-American Community

The Los Angeles Times reported on Henry Schiff, 39, who had his name legally changed several years ago to Henry Lizardlover Seven in tribute to the 30 companion exotic lizards he keeps in his one-bedroom apartment and around which he centers his life. Henry is single and sleeps alone on a mattress on the floor but says he recently had a girlfriend until he became wary of her insisting on sharing her bed with a large iguana she owned.

Least Competent Criminals

Two gunmen who robbed a branch of the San Diego

when he commandeered the family car, which had one flat tire, and cruised down U.S. 41 near Tampa, Fla., hitting two parked cars and narrowly missing several moving ones. Mikey's assessment: "I go zoom." On Nov. 11, using a cigarette lighter, Mikey burned down his family's house, sending his father to the hospital with second- and third-degree burns. Mikey's assessment: "Now I have no more house."

Eh-UUUUUh, Gross

-A 25th wedding anniversary party was disrupted in Webster, Mass., in November when 20 people were hospitalized because the chicken-gizzards-and-bananas dish, which is a Puerto Rican delicacy, spoiled.

-China's *Nanjing Daily* reported in May that farmer Li Hongzhong, 42, has eaten a snake nearly every day for the past 20 years, feels miserable on the days he can't eat one, and not surprisingly has had difficulty meeting prospective marriage partners. Reporters witnessed Li eating a two-foot-long snake that was twisting violently as he swallowed it.

-In March a small dump truck overturned in Marietta, Ohio, littering the street with cow parts. A smaller shipment fell off a truck on the same street the following week, running the total of cow-parts spills to four within a year. Said City Councilwoman Katie McGlynn, "I would just like to know why this continues to happen. Maybe we need a stronger ordinance to make this a more serious crime."

-In June, Steven Muys, 27, and Candace Temen, 21, were charged with mistreatment of animals in Park Forest, Ill., after police responded to a neighbor's complaint of a bad smell coming from their home. Muys told police the smell was probably the cat's litter box, but when police went to the basement to view it, they found 42 snakes and nearly 800 mice and rats, which were apparently being bred as food for the snakes.

-Dairy farmer Anthony Tworek, 31, slipped from a stepladder in Clarksdale, Mo., in May, falling backward with such force that he impaled himself by the neck on a 1 1/2-inch thick pole. The pole entered alongside his carotid artery but did not touch it and went through the roof of his mouth, missing his brain by half an inch. He fully recovered.

People Unclear on the Concept

-In February, in Columbia S.C., a bullet was fired through the office window of county treasurer Marjorie Sharpe amidst growing displeasure at delays in her office's tax-appeal hearings. Sharpe told reporters, "Don't (the vandals) realize it's going to make their tax bills (even) higher when we have to replace these windows?"

Least Competent Criminals

On Oct. 29, two men approached a teller at the Harbor Bank in Baltimore with a note reading: "I have a gun. Gimme (sic) your money or else." According to a witness, the teller looked at the note, which was written on the back of a deposit slip for another bank, and replied, "This is a Maryland National (Bank) transaction - you have to go to Maryland National." The men looked at each other, panicked and ran off.

ESW

Trust & Savings Bank in San Diego, Calif., in November were caught when an elderly motorist rammed the robbers' getaway car. Police had photographs of the robbers, anyway, because they had donned their ski masks outside the bank right in front of the ATM camera.

On Oct. 1, Mikey Sproul, age 3, made national news