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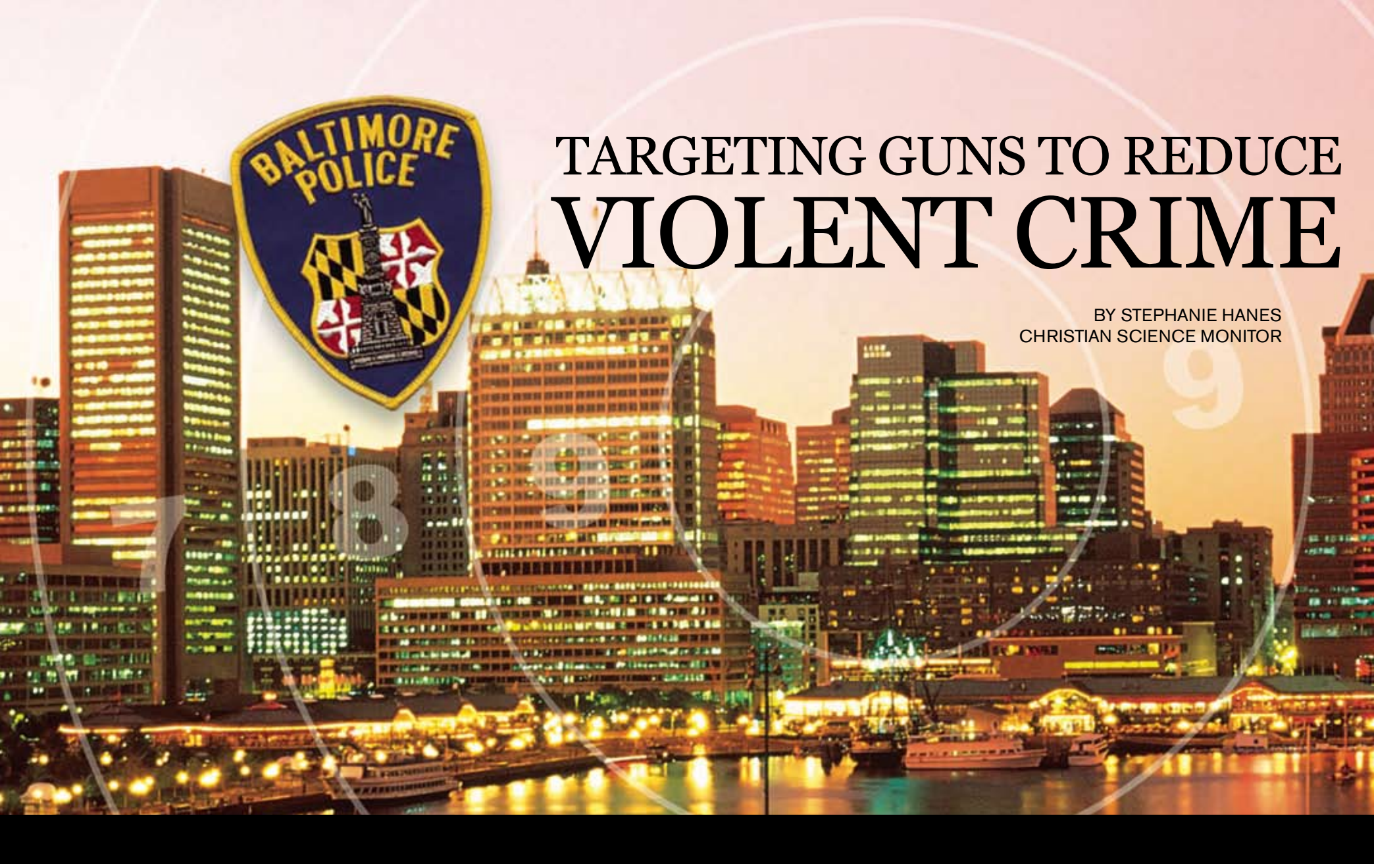
Targeting GUNS to reduce violent crime



TARGETING GUNS TO REDUCE VIOLENT CRIME

BY STEPHANIE HANES
CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

They are not necessarily drug kingpins or murderers or even dealers. But to Baltimore Police Commissioner Frederick H. Bealefeld III, they are top priority in a city with one of the highest homicide rates in the country; a city that residents occasionally, grimly, refer to as *Bodymore, Murderland*.

They are, he says, "bad guys with guns." And he wants them off the street.

"If you start boiling down the violence in Baltimore – the homicides and the nonfatal shootings – you find that 50 percent of all the people we charge with those offenses have one thing in common: They have gun offenses in their backgrounds," Mr. Bealefeld says.

"And we know that when bad guys get out, they get guns again. They don't work for IBM. They don't hand out Bibles. They stand outside with guns waiting to perpetrate another crime."

And so, Bealefeld says, he has made it clear whom his officers should be targeting.

"I don't aim to make [it] all that complicated," he says. "Find out all we can about gun offenders and focus on those guys."

After years of fighting the so-called "war on drugs" – the obsessive pursuit of everyone involved in drug crime, from users to dealers to suppliers – Bealefeld and other police chiefs nationwide are shifting their focus toward a new prime target: gun offenders.

This law enforcement philosophy is born of the growing acknowledgment that millions of dollars and arrests have done little to slow urban America's drug trade, and that a fresh strategy is needed to further reduce violence in the country's toughest cities.

From new gunshot-detection cameras in New Haven, Conn., to a gun-offender registry in Baltimore; from a Sacramento, Calif., law requiring gun dealers to notify police about people who buy bullets to a proposal approved by the Los Angeles City Council that would let landlords evict tenants convicted of gun crimes, city police departments and governments are putting new emphasis on fighting illegal guns.

Police Commissioner Frederick H. Bealefeld III

The shifts are local, differ from city to city, and are largely beneath the radar of the national gun control debate. Yet taken together, it is a sea change in how cities are attempting to tackle what has often been viewed as hopeless, ingrained urban violence, say criminal justice analysts.

"You're never going to stop the drug trade," says Sheryl Goldstein, the director of the mayor's office on criminal justice in Baltimore.

"For a long time, many police departments in this country really focused on the war against drugs – they believed that drug trade sparked violence.... [Now] we're seeing a shifting of that focus to gun trafficking and getting guns off the street."

Baltimore, under the guidance of Bealefeld, shows one of the clearest breaks with old police strategy.

The commissioner has encouraged his officers to focus their efforts on gun crime, even if that means letting some drug arrests slide. The "bad guy" with the gun, he says, is the focus.

"When my cops pull up to a corner, what I want them to do is look for that guy first," Bealefeld says, pointing to a face on the flat-screen. "The 15-year-old with three bags of weed? He's going to drop the weed and run and lead them on a four-block foot chase.

"The guy with the gun, with the baggy pants and no belt? With the Glock jammed down there? He's going to saunter off very quietly. He's been arrested before; he knows what cops do.... I want my cop to get out of my car and say, 'Run, Forrest, run. But *you* sit down. I'm talking to *you*."

Bealefeld's strategy is multipronged: He has created a gun-trace task force, coordinated more closely with parole officers, and has worked with city and court officials to develop a gun offender registry – one of the first in the country – that tracks his "bad guys" much the way sex offender registries do.

For example, on Dec. 17, police got a tip that a man named Marcus Ellis was involved in a narcotics deal.

After checking with parole and probation officers, the police realized that not only was Ellis on

probation for recent drug offenses, but he also had a history of handgun violations.

They quickly got a search warrant, and found that Ellis was carrying a semiautomatic 9mm handgun. These sorts of arrests happen regularly, Bealefeld says.

Although Baltimore has made some of the boldest moves to target illegal guns, and is unique in the extent of its gun crimes – during the past decade, the number of nonfatal shootings has neared 1,000 a year in this city of 600,000 – it is not alone in the way that the focus of law enforcement has shifted.

Though national rates of robbery, murder, and rape have fallen since the 1990s, gun violence in inner cities has persisted or increased. Criminologists at Northeastern University in Boston, Mass., for instance, released a study in early 2009 showing that the number of young black men and teenagers who either killed or were killed in gun crimes has increased 40 percent since 2000.

To fight this trend, police departments across the country have put more resources into gun units, prioritized gun arrests, and have worked with federal prosecutors to take gun cases into federal court. City leaders have also joined the effort; in just the three years since New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Boston Mayor Thomas Menino created Mayors Against Illegal Guns, the active group has grown from 13 members to more than 450.

Also, in some large cities, health departments have increasingly supported peer-to-peer antigun efforts, many modeled on the successful Ceasefire programs in Chicago and Boston, where former gang members help mediate conflicts before anyone resolves them with a gun.

"There is a variation in how [different] cities and departments have approached the problem of firearms," says Richard Rosenfeld, professor of criminology and criminal justice at the University of Missouri, St. Louis. "There is a variation when it comes to strategy.

"But across the country, there has certainly been a heightened focus on reducing firearm crime. And privately, many will say that the drug war has been ineffective and a waste of public resources."

It is not as if any police department is giving up fighting drug crime, however. According to the US Bureau of Justice Statistics, drug-related arrests continue to rise. In 2007, there were more than 1.8 million drug-related arrests – most for drug possession – compared with 1980, when the number was less than 600,000.

Even in police departments such as Baltimore's, where guns are the explicit priority, it will probably take years before there is a full institutional adjustment, criminal justice scholars say.

"I think that there is a shift," says Daniel Webster, the head of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Gun Policy and Research. "I think it can be shifted more.... I see more big-city departments putting greater resources to the gun effort, but you don't change institutions overnight.

"In my mind, the direction they should be heading is [toward] devoting fewer resources to disrupting illegal drug markets and more resources to disrupting illegal gun markets. They've been trying to fight this drug war for eons and they really haven't been effective.... Sometimes it is even counterproductive – we know that drug markets are most violent when they are destabilized."

Taking aim at gun crime has its roots in the early 1990s, when police departments and city governments started experimenting with new ways of fighting the crack cocaine wars that had propelled homicide numbers to record highs, says Hubert Williams, president of the Police Foundation.

Gun buy-back programs, background checks, and, in some cities, out-and-out handgun bans were some of the measures put in place to get a handle on growing urban violence.

One well-known program, which, unlike many of the other efforts, had the support of the National Rifle Association (NRA), was "Project Exile" in Richmond, Va.

Here, federal and local law enforcement teamed together to literally exile convicted gun offenders from the region; because of the federal system's stricter sentencing laws and its expansive federal prison network, someone convicted of illegal gun possession not only got more time, but often served it hundreds of miles away from friends and family.

"For some people, when they get up in the morning, putting on the gun is like putting on their pants," Mr. Williams says. "And the question was, is there a message that we can get to these primarily young adults and kids that are carrying the weapons? In Richmond, police handed out cards that said, 'Carrying a gun will get you five.' At some point the message got through."

There has been much debate about Project Exile's effectiveness, however. Although killings in Richmond dropped 30 percent, critics claim the reduction was due to other factors, and that similar cities saw even greater declines without a comparable program. Williams says efforts to expand Project Exile to other jurisdictions fell flat, in large part because federal judges believed it was the responsibility of state courts to handle gun crimes.

Other innovative efforts against illegal guns "came to a screeching halt in 2000 with the Bush administration and a new Congress," says James Fox, a law and criminal justice professor at Northeastern University. Congress, for instance, passed laws that restricted local law enforcement's access to Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) gun trace data; the NRA continued to oppose any efforts to limit gun trafficking or sales.

Many in city government and law enforcement see the gun control debate as a large obstacle to more effective gun prosecutions.

Although those involved in the growing effort against illegal guns are quick to say that their focus is not about gun ownership rights, but about criminal behavior, they also acknowledge that it has become difficult in the United States to talk about any sort of gun regulation without delving into the emotional, larger debate. And one component of police and city efforts to target illegal firearms is, in fact, stricter legislation – both state and federal.

In Maryland, for instance, Baltimore city representatives have pushed the state legislature to pass tougher gun penalties. In Massachusetts, proponents have asked for tougher sentencing laws and the ability to hold gun offenders without bail.

Mayors Against Illegal Guns has lobbied for changes to federal law, asking the Obama administration to allow the ATF to release to local officials more gun trace data. It has also supported legislation to block people on terrorism watch lists from purchasing guns and has pushed for an end to so-called gun-show loopholes, in which unlicensed firearms sellers can sidestep background-check requirements.

All of which sound warning bells to gun rights groups such as the NRA.

"The NRA has been on record for decades talking about strict and unequivocal prosecution of gun crimes," says Andrew Arulanandam, spokesman for the NRA. "The problem with groups like Mayors Against Illegal Guns is that they are actually a group that proposes gun control legislation, which will only affect law-abiding citizens.

"Find out all we can about gun offenders and focus on those guys."

"If you would just do some rudimentary research on existing gun laws and penalties that apply to them, you would find that existing laws are adequate."

It's already a crime for a convicted felon to have a gun, so further regulation is overkill, reason those who oppose gun controls. The NRA has urged its members to put pressure on politicians to leave the group.

For its part, Mayors Against Illegal Guns insists it supports Second Amendment rights. But the strident response from the gun lobby discourages national politicians from advocating changes to gun laws, say those working for more gun regulation.

"It's been a toxic issue," says John Feinblatt, Mayor Bloomberg's criminal justice coordinator. "The Democrats don't want to touch it because they blame their losses in '94 on it. It's become a political hot potato. But the mayors know this isn't about politics. This is about people's lives."

For now, says Robyn Thomas, executive director of the Legal Community Against Violence, the movement against illegal guns is likely to have most success on a local level.

"There is more political traction now in cities," she says. "That's where we're seeing the change."

Still, as baltimore shows, this change can be significant. Since Bealefeld took the commissioner job two years ago, with the explicit goal of targeting gun crimes, homicide numbers in the city have dropped to record lows. The 234 murders in the city in 2008 was the lowest annual total in two decades; by Dec. 29, 2009, the city had 235, indicating a sustained trend rather than –

as usually happens in Baltimore – a one-year dip.

Nonfatal shooting numbers have also dropped. In the early 2000s there were close to 1,000 nonfatal shootings in Baltimore annually; by Dec. 29 of 2009 there were 447 – down 23 percent from last year.

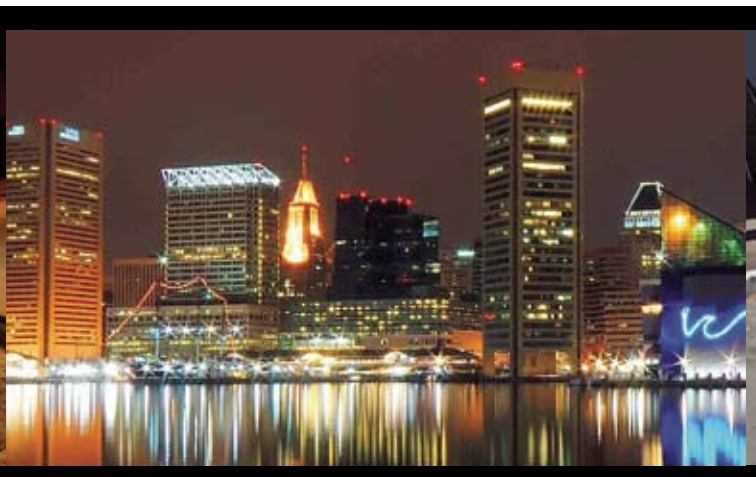
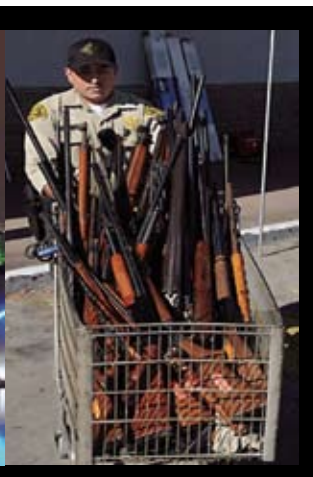
And over the past two years, the department has seized 5,000 illegal guns – a number that equals 10 percent of the guns sold legally in Maryland, but only a fraction of the illegal firearms police believe are in the city. (In New York, a city with a population more than 10 times that of Baltimore, police only confiscated about twice that number.)

Other cities engaging in the new focus also show progress.

Boston, for instance, which put a gun buy-back program into effect in 2006 after a spike in gun violence, has seen a decrease in nonfatal shootings – 323 in 2006, 273 in 2007, 274 in 2008, and just 191 as of Dec. 13, 2009. In New York, after years of refocused enforcement, police are finding fewer illegal guns on the street – 7,059 in 2006 and 5,913 in 2007, for example.

"I am just so convinced, and so animated, about this notion of going after gun violence," Bealefeld says. "Because we've been debating about the efficacy of drug enforcement, and whether we should legalize drugs, or what we should do about drugs, blah blah blah blah blah drugs forever. You can't get five people to agree on it. But I could get 500, I could get 5,000, I could get 500,000 to agree that one guy with a gun constitutes a danger to them. I can." ●



The top man in the Baltimore Police Department is standing in an alley not far from the housing complex people here call "Target City."

It's a nickname born of gun violence and could apply to more than just those low-income apartments. There are dozens of shootings in this city each week – over drugs and respect, corners and feuds, domestic violence and business deals gone bad.

There are a growing number of gang shootouts, too, including one last summer that sent tourists diving for cover at the popular Inner Harbor waterfront area. And in August, Baltimore made national news when 12 people were wounded at a shootout at a backyard barbecue.

All of which helps explains why, here in this trash-strewn alley illuminated by the headlights of a police cruiser, Frederick H. Bealefeld III is telling the mother of three teenagers that she – not the cops – is the one who needs to deal with the fact that he just caught her boys smoking marijuana.

Backing off can be just as important as cracking down, knows the veteran of Baltimore crime fighting.

Mr. Bealefeld speaks respectfully, like an old friend of the family who just happened upon the kids' misbehavior and is letting their mom know about it. His Baltimore accent echoes hers, and he's relaxed, showing none of the aggressiveness or attitude one might expect in a section of the city where tensions between police and residents are severe.

Even the boys' mother, and the family pressing up behind her in the doorway, seem taken aback that this tall white man isn't, in fact, going to hassle them.

And that's all Bealefeld: accustomed to shaking expectations. He grew up in a family full of men who wore the blue uniform, and he rose from street corner patrolman who chased down his share of drug deals and gunslingers to become commissioner two years ago. He never went to college, has lived his whole life in Baltimore, and spent 28 years on the police force.

Yet Bealefeld has bucked established department policy dramatically, pushing for a new, tighter focus on guns and gun offenders, while also emphasizing improved relations with the city's black residents.

He has become known as being exceptionally blunt, a colorful character who can disarm criminals, politicians, and citizens alike. The Baltimore Sun once published a column of Bealefeld quotes turned into poetry; after losing a bet with the mayor's office over who could best run the Baltimore Marathon, the commissioner sang – badly – Whitney Houston's "I'm Every Woman" on a popular radio show.

He's a regular participant in neighborhood safety walks, meets with community groups across the city, and still plays in multiple weekly ice hockey games.

But more important than the image, people here say, are the results underlying the personality: Under his leadership, Baltimore has seen the lowest homicide numbers in 20 years; nonfatal shootings are also at a decades-long low. And according to the mayor's office, the number of complaints called in against the police – in the past an almost daily event – have dropped significantly.

Earlier this decade, Baltimore tried to implement a "zero tolerance" policing policy – a strategy used to much acclaim in New York City, where officers arrested people for the most minor of violations. Get the troublemakers off the street, the theory went, and less trouble will happen; moreover, police might get tips from small-time crooks to nab the truly dangerous criminals.

In Baltimore, however, that strategy didn't make a dent: Homicides continued upward, and the historically bad relationship between police and black residents deteriorated further.

"To get one tuna, you'd get a bunch of herring, and some minnows, and eels, and all sorts of stuff you don't want," Bealefeld says using the trademark allegorical style that makes his press attaché, Anthony Guglielmi, put his head in his hands. "If sharks are the problem, then sharpen a spear and go after sharks.

"Listen, I'm being facetious, but the analogy gets back to the core of relationships in city. And in particular African-American cities like Baltimore.... You know what I heard a lot in my 28 years here?

"I've gone and done search warrants, gone and done battle with guys on the street, and we're dragging these guys off and we think we've done a good deed, we think we've done something good for the community – and we hear people yelling, 'Why don't you get the big guys?' And it's like, 'The guy had a kilo in his car! What are you talking about? I think he's a big fish.' " But not to them. That's not their priority.

"You know who their priorities are? These guys who are riding around with guns who rob them every time their kids go to the store. The community – they [understand] the drugs.... They don't like them, but they're really, really worried about these guys with guns shooting their children...."

Since becoming commissioner, Bealefeld has told his officers to focus on gun offenders. And it is a point of pride to him that while murder numbers have dropped significantly under his watch, so have arrests. In 2005, police made 105,000 arrests in this city of 600,000. Last year, which had the lowest homicide numbers in two decades, the number of arrests dropped to 75,000.

So Bealefeld leaves the three teenage boys sitting on the ground in the alley under the watch of another officer and walks through the backyard to chat further with their mother. The woman looks ashen as she stands in her doorway, family members peeking around her.

She explains that the kids had slipped out of a family gathering; tonight was her mother's funeral.

"Their grandma?" Bealefeld is indignant, his eyes locked on hers, but his posture still relaxed. "They do not need to be out acting foolish. Tonight of all nights. Right now your family's grieving. You don't need any more drama. I'm going to leave them for you to take care of, OK?"

She clasps her hands in thanks, and he turns to the teens.

"You could be on your way to central booking," he says harshly. "You don't need to be going there tonight.... You need to be in the house being men. OK? And remembering your grandma. That's what I need you to do. That's what your family needs you to do."

The teens start to shuffle back into the house, heads down.

"Excuse me," the woman says to the boys, glaring. She is empowered, hands on hips, on Bealefeld's team.

"I believe a thank-you is in order."

"Thank you," they mumble toward the commissioner.

He nods to their mother, walks back toward his SUV, and continues his nighttime patrol of the city. That's the corner where a 5-year-old got shot, he points out. There's the liquor store stoop where he regularly found bodies as a homicide detective.

He muses about the teens he encountered in the alley: "By arresting a couple of kids with weed, am I affecting the crime problem? I don't think I am. The power of that family will do more good for the kids than me taking them down to baby booking [juvenile detention]. I would trade a lot of missed drug lockups for a bad guy with a gun."

He looks out at the urban landscape - rows of boarded up houses, crumbling brick and wood in a weed-laced street; occasionally a swath illuminated by the surreal blue light of a Baltimore Police Department camera.

"Guns, guns, guns," he says. "It all comes back to guns." ●

How the CIA can improve its operations in Afghanistan

BY DAVID IGNATIUS, WASHINGTON POST

In terms of loss of life, the bombing of the CIA base in Khost, Afghanistan, may be the most costly mistake in the agency's history. So it's important to look carefully for clues about how it happened and lessons for the future.

CIA veterans cite a series of warning signs that the agency wasn't paying enough attention to the counterintelligence threat posed by al-Qaeda. These danger signals weren't addressed because the agency underestimated its adversary and overestimated its own skills and those of its allies.

The time to fix these problems is now -- not with a spasm of second-guessing that will further weaken the CIA but through the agency's own adaptation to this war zone. As the Khost attack made painfully clear, the CIA needs better tradecraft for this conflict.

By getting a suicide bomber inside a CIA base, the al-Qaeda network showed that it remains a sophisticated adversary, despite intense pressure from CIA Predator attacks. "They didn't get lucky, they got good and we got sloppy all over Afghanistan," says one agency counterterrorism veteran.

This shouldn't have been a surprise: CIA sources say that over the past year, two al-Qaeda allies in Afghanistan -- the Haqqani and Hekmatyar networks -- have run double-agent operations. That tactic succeeded disastrously in Khost a week ago, when the CIA's defenses were penetrated by a Jordanian doctor posing as an informant for the Jordanian intelligence service.

Why wasn't the Jordanian debriefed outside the base, or thoroughly searched when he arrived, given the danger that he might have been turned by al-Qaeda? Did the CIA trust its Jordanian ally too much? Those basic questions need answers.

The Haqqani and Hekmatyar double agents were uncovered last year, through polygraphs and other means, but agency insiders argue that these cases should have prompted tougher countermeasures. Both the Haqqani and Hekmatyar groups have their own intelligence units, and their operatives were expertly trained in the 1980s by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence directorate.

Muslim extremists are using increasingly sophisticated tools -- sometimes the very techniques that have been deployed against them.

One example is the software used by Hezbollah to analyze patterns of cellphone calling and expose an Israeli spy network in Lebanon last year. Iran, too, uses sophisticated pattern analysis to study which of its nuclear scientists might have been recruited by the West.

Despite this growing threat, the CIA has devoted only limited resources to defending itself. Within its large Kabul station, the CIA is said to have just two officers working full time on counterintelligence. There's a similar lack of resources devoted to Pakistani operations against the agency.

The 2004 intelligence reorganization added more layering and bureaucracy but not more muscle. It created a new National Counterintelligence Executive Office, but this group has focused on traditional targets, such as Russia and China, rather than new ones.

The CIA's career track is another troubling part of the problem. The complex penetration and deception operations that could counter al-Qaeda take time and patience.

"We live in two-year cycles," says one insider. The rational careerist looks at a penetration or deception plan and concludes: "It's too time-consuming, it won't get me promoted."

What's most troubling is that over the past year, the CIA has had what this source calls "egregious lapses of counterintelligence and security at the bases in Afghanistan."

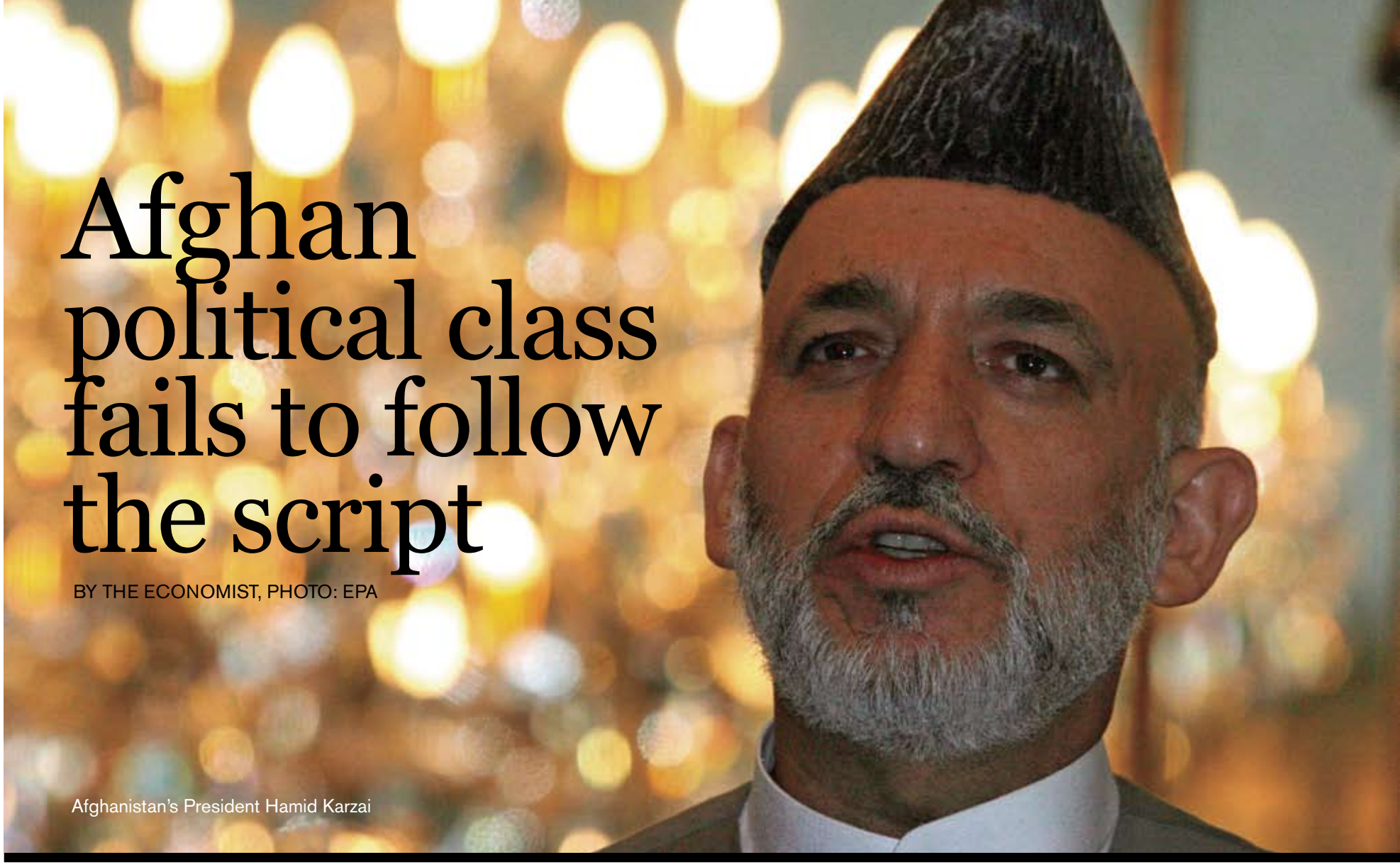
Evidence of sloppy procedures is said to have surfaced last fall at an agency base in southern Afghanistan. One of its vehicles was stolen, but headquarters wasn't notified for several weeks. Someone was caught photographing the entry gate of the base, but he was turned over to the Afghan police initially, rather than agency operatives.

A final obvious problem is training. Case officers need more preparation for high-threat meetings and paramilitary challenges than they're getting.

After any calamity, there are always haunting "what ifs." But looking in the rearview mirror isn't going to make the CIA any stronger or better. The Khost attack shows that the al-Qaeda network, though badly wounded, remains a wily and resourceful foe. The inescapable conclusion is that the CIA and its allies need to lift their game. ●

Afghan political class fails to follow the script

BY THE ECONOMIST, PHOTO: EPA



Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai

This was supposed to be the moment when Afghanistan would put an end to nearly eight months of political turmoil and get on with beating the Taliban.

Optimistic Western diplomats hoped Hamid Karzai would move beyond his fraudulent re-election as president, by appointing a government of talented technocrats. And another election, this time for parliament, would be quietly dropped, letting General Stanley McChrystal, the American commander of NATO forces, concentrate on using the extra troops granted him by Barack Obama to "secure the population" rather than just polling stations.

The Afghan political class, however, is proving loath to follow the West's script.

Two problems threaten months more political uncertainty and perhaps another constitutional crisis. The first is that parliament has turned down 17 out of Karzai's 24 ministerial nominees. Some rejections were expected, but not on this scale.

The members of parliament themselves seem shocked, although many talk of striking a blow against "shareholder democracy" -- what they see as a blatant attempt by warlords, regardless of their competence or record, to grab cabinet jobs in return for help given to Karzai in last year's election.

Most of the rejects were allied to civil war-era militia leaders or political parties. One, Ismail Khan, turned down for reappointment to his old job as energy minister, was a particularly famous warlord.

Some detect a heartening sign of assertiveness from Afghanistan's much-abused parliament; others a cunning plot by Karzai to use parliament to get rid of people he never wanted in his cabinet anyway.

But most, including the senior United Nations man in the country, Kai Eide, worry that it will only prolong the political paralysis afflicting Afghanistan. The government has done little since campaigning began in the presidential election last July.

Accusations of massive fraud and the need for a complex recount and audit meant Karzai was not declared the winner until November. The appointment of his cabinet was further delayed by complex horse-trading over jobs between Karzai and his warlord supporters -- a task made all the harder because Karzai had apparently promised the same jobs to a number of different people.

In the meantime thousands of projects have stalled as donors wait for new ministers to be appointed.

Western diplomats will be pleased that most of the seven ministers parliament did approve are seen as competent technocrats, and they have been given the most important ministries, including defense, interior and finance.

But Karzai does not want to be presiding over a half- formed government when he meets foreign leaders in London on Jan. 28. That gathering, according to the British prime minister, Gordon Brown, is meant to push for the transfer of more responsibility for running Afghanistan to a competent new government, as a prelude to an eventual withdrawal of foreign troops.

Karzai has ordered members of parliament to delay their winter break, due to begin in the coming days, in the hope of pushing through new nominees before the London conference. But parliamentarians may well object again if a cabinet full of warlords' associates is proposed. Indeed, some optimists say that if parliament maintains its demand for clean ministers then the country might end up with a genuinely decent cabinet -- eventually.

Yet Karzai has to reward his supporters somehow, or risk seeing his political coalition fray or even drift towards Abdullah Abdullah, the runner-up in the presidential election, who has emerged as the country's main opposition leader. Many names are therefore likely to reappear, albeit for different ministerial jobs. Even if Karzai manages to scrape together a full cabinet soon, the second problem is looming. The Independent Election Commission (IEC) has decreed that parliamentary elections must go ahead on May 22.

After last year's violent, fraud-ridden presidential and provincial polls, another round of voting in just five months is a sickening prospect for foreign diplomats and election workers. May is the start of the "fighting season." Dire security in much of the country, along with a lack of time to vet candidates, bodes ill for a new election.

Again it is probably meddling foreigners who will get the blame if the election is aborted. The IEC has said polling can proceed, but only if it receives more money and polling-day security, both of which are in the gift of foreign powers.

If the West refuses to stump up, it will be in the embarrassing situation of deciding when elections should go ahead in a supposedly sovereign country, and at a time when its priority is meant to be "Afghanization."

This would also create another painful political dilemma when parliament's span expires in June: should Afghanistan just live without a parliament or should its term be extended?

An extension is more likely, even though most lawyers would argue that it would be unconstitutional. But then, says one Western diplomat, so was the decision to extend Karzai's term last year and, indeed, to declare him president when he failed to win the required half of all votes.

"This is Afghanistan," says the diplomat, "they have grown used to changing the rules as they go along." ●

Why seniors really should fear swine flu

BY SHARON BEGLEY, WASHINGTON POST WRITER"S GROUP

In the federal government's explanations of swine flu, through its web site and public-service announcements, one message has come through loud and clear: seniors can rest easy. Children face a much greater risk from this disease, and they are dying from it in numbers never seen with regular, seasonal flu. Maybe seniors even have some special immunity to H1N1. There's only one problem: according to a new analysis, the CDC's own numbers show clearly and unequivocally that H1N1 is more than twice as deadly to seniors as to children.

As a result, "many older adults undoubtedly underestimate their own risk and the importance of getting vaccinated," says Peter Sandman, a longtime scholar of risk communication. "Older adults have been told they don't have to worry, and that's not true. If the virus comes back, people will die."

Sandman's analysis of the latest estimates of cases, hospitalizations, and deaths by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is here, but let me summarize the basics. Children 0 to 17 are likeliest to catch swine flu. But adults (18 to 64) and seniors (65 and older) are much more likely to die of the disease. Kids are least likely to die if they catch swine flu.

Specifically, an estimated 21.3 percent of children 0 to 17 (of whom there are 75 million) have contracted H1N1. Of those 16 million cases, there have been 71,000 hospitalizations and 1,090 deaths. That works out to a case-hospitalization rate (the chance of being hospitalized if you contract H1N1) of 0.44 percent, and a case-fatality rate (the risk of dying of the flu if you get it) of 0.007 percent.

Compare those numbers with those for America's 194 million 18-to-64s. Of them, 27 million have contracted H1N1, 121,000 have been hospitalized, and 7,450 have died. A little math shows that 13.9 percent of this age group has contracted the illness, but that the case-hospitalization rate is 0.45 percent and the case-fatality rate is 0.028 percent—*quadruple* that of children.

Finally, among the nation's 39 million seniors, there have been 4 million cases, 21,000 hospitalizations, and 1,280 deaths. That yields a 10.3 percent risk of contracting H1N1, a case-hospitalization rate of 0.52 percent, and a case-fatality rate of 0.032 percent—the highest of any age group.

The CDC did not dispute these numbers when I e-mailed them to epidemiologist Beth Bell, an M.D. who is associate director for epidemiologic science at CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. "The basic calculation is right," she told me. "You have uncovered an important reality about H1N1: seniors are not immune to it, and we should encourage older people to get vaccinated."

Yet even leading physicians are still getting the risk calculus wrong. In a recent interview, Joseph Stubbs, president of the American College of Physicians, said, "So far the H1N1 virus has [caused] ... 10,000 deaths. Most of these deaths have occurred among young people, which is particularly tragic."

I won't dispute the "tragic" part, but the facts are otherwise: 1,090 deaths in people under 18, and 7,450 deaths among adults under 65. And the CDC still describes the swine-flu threat to people over 65 this way (I've annotated some of the statements, in parentheses): "The new 2009 H1N1 virus does not seem to be affecting people 65 years and older in the same way that seasonal flu usually does." (True: with seasonal flu, some 90 percent of deaths are of people 65 and older, whereas with H1N1 13 percent of deaths have been in this age group.) "Most people who have gotten sick from this new virus have been younger." (True.) "People 65 and older are less likely to get infected with this new virus." (True: a risk of about 10 percent vs. 14 percent for younger adults and 21 percent for children.)

"There have been relatively few infections and even fewer cases of serious illness and death with this new virus in people older than 65." (Seriously misleading: the risk of death for a senior who contracts H1N1 is more than four times that of a child who gets it.) "But while people 65 and older are less likely to be infected with 2009 H1N1 flu, those that do become infected are at greater risk of having serious complications from their illness." (Yes—which leads to the question, why have seniors had to wait at the end of the line, so to speak, to receive vaccinations?)

The answer to that last question seems to be twofold. The first is that children 0 to 17 are at higher risk from H1N1 than they are from seasonal flu. The second is that children are little Typhoid Marys: whatever they catch, they spread to more people than seniors do. CDC's decision to prioritize children—especially during the fall, when vaccine was in short supply—made sense from this perspective.

But that decision, and the widespread belief that seniors have little to fear from H1N1, could now prove deadly. As Sandman puts it, "I thought there was some sense of putting kids first, especially when vaccine was scarce, to control the spread. It wasn't crazy, even though it was false [to say that seniors face less risk from H1N1 than children do].

"But we are paying a high price for that miscommunication: I know a lot of seniors who say they've pushed their grandchildren to get vaccinated, but won't do it themselves. They've been told they don't have to worry, and that is not true."

The CDC's policy of putting children first for vaccines and downplaying the risk to older adults "went from being unwise, though understandable, to being a deadly piece of miscommunication," he says. "CDC and HHS continue to dig a deeper and deeper hole by exclusively saying that children are most at risk."

Indeed, during PSAs that aired during college-bowl games, the HHS continued to hammer home the message that "young Americans have been especially hard hit by the 2009 H1N1 flu," as a press release quotes HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius as saying. The ad, the department explains, is "aimed at encouraging young people and all Americans to get vaccinated against the H1N1 flu." Again, young people—who have only one quarter the risk of dying from H1N1 if they catch it—come first.

Dr. Beth Bell told me that CDC's vaccine recommendations are "flexible, and should change based on the availability of vaccine and epidemiology"—that is, which population groups are getting sick and dying. "We completely agree with you that at this juncture, when we have a window of opportunity, vaccinations should be expanded to those 65 and older."

That's a welcome about-face, but it remains to be seen if the CDC, or the media, can change the very prevalent mindset among Americans that older adults don't really need to get the H1N1 vaccine. So far, the CDC estimates that 60 million Americans have received the H1N1 vaccine, with twice as many children as adults getting immunized.

Sadly, it also appears that the government remains far from acknowledging the import of its own statistics. ●

Hiding the good stories

One of the best reported stories to appear in the local daily newspaper recently was buried on page B6 of the Indian River County section *(you know, the section that contains the **Pets of the Week** and the **Reader Snapshot**)* in last Sunday's paper.

This story by Melissa E. Holsman, flanked on the page by a press release for the Sebastian Girl Scouts' cookie sale and a public notice of Indian River County's deadline for accepting Comprehensive Plan amendment applications, reported in considerable detail on a suit scheduled to go to trial on Jan. 25th involving two dermatologists.

The dermatologist being sued in this case is Dr. Tim Ioannides, a high-profile resident of Castaway Cove who was in the news a couple of months ago when his German Shepherds chased down an elderly couple on Vero's South Beach.

In this latest story by Holsman, she reports that "court papers reveal how a once-close friendship was eroded by allegations of broken engagements over sordid office affairs, sexual trysts with female staffers and claims of pressure to perform unnecessary medical procedures to boost profits."

The latter part of that sentence struck us as particularly interesting, and the story goes on to say that the plaintiff in this case, Dr. Ricardo Romagosa, alleged in his breach of contract and fraud suit against Treasure Coast Dermatology that Ioannides repeatedly encouraged him "to perform unnecessarily more complex medical procedures because they were financially more lucrative."

Gosh, with everyone worrying about soaring health care costs, that sounds like a story that might interest many readers of the local daily newspaper. But not only could the story not make its way into the front section of the Sunday paper; it could not even make it onto the front of the Treasure Coast section, which featured compelling headlines like "**Post office delivers on Old Glory by replacing old one**."

We would hate to think the reason Holsman's story was passed over for page 3 of the front section in favor of a wire service report saying "Senate health bill would raise costs" *(big surprise there)* was that the story would have had to appear right over a large ad for – you guessed it – Treasure Coast Dermatology. Nah, that couldn't possibly have been the reason. ●

Part 2: Baffle them with...

One of these days, we are going to get a straight story from the daily newspaper and the Vero Beach Utility Department about electric rates. But last Saturday -- when the local daily carried the front page headlines "**New power provider: Costs will be competitive with FPL**" and "**OUC customers have had rates lower than FPL in recent years**" -- was not one of those days.

What the stories went to say was that in the three years prior to last March, Orlando area residential customers served by OUC – which is now providing wholesale power to Vero Beach – were paying monthly electric bills that were lower than their bills would have been if they were served by Florida Power and Light.

Well, good for them. But this, as far as we can tell, has nothing to do with OUC's contract with Vero Beach, and has no implications in terms of whether customers of Vero Beach utilities will ever see electric rates that compare with those charged by FPL.

In fact, if we are to believe anything we read in these stories, that would be close to impossible.

Why? OUC, the story goes on to say, will take the price it pays for the power it provides its own customers, and charge Vero Beach the "same price" except for marking it up with a "demand charge" – there's a new phrase for you – which will represent its profit on the contract.

"That demand charge can amount to 40 percent or more of the total bulk power charge that customers will see on their bills," the local daily says with neither comment nor explanation.

Let us try to understand this for a second. OUC is going to mark up its wholesale power charge by up to 40 percent (!) for Vero Beach customers, and we are to believe that even with that, our "costs will be competitive with FPL?" Please!

The hopelessly confusing story then goes on to talk about the "base rate" portion of the bill, which includes a "customer service charge," and a "per-kilowatt-hour" charge that varies depending on whether you use more than 1,000 kilowatts of electricity or less per month.

The "base rate," according to interim Electric Utilities Director John Lee, is now going to cover different expenditures than it did last year, and is going down for all Vero Beach electric customers. Great.

But what gets lost in this story is that while the "base rate" in 2010 – the top line on your Vero Beach Utilities electric bill – will include a variety of things (including rebuilding the Utility Department's reserves), it will *not* include any payment for actual electricity.

The power you are being charged for will be on a separate line, and that's the cost that is going to be marked up with the "demand charge."

So when you read another incomprensible story quoting Lee about how your "base rate" in 2010 will be even lower than the "base rate" paid by residential customers in the Orlando area, do not be fooled into believing your total bill will be lower than theirs.

Thanks to a hefty markup on electricity by our new power provider, and the city government's determination to squeeze $8 million annually out of electric customers to hold down city property taxes, Vero Beach Utilities customers will continue to pay more than Orlando residential customers – and once again in 2010, we will continue to pay more than FPL customers as well. ●

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A no-fly list? Count many of us in

BY JONAH GOLDBERG, LOS ANGELES TIMES

Almost 10 years ago this week, I boarded a Northwest Airlines plane in Minneapolis. As I started to my veal-pen seat in steerage, I saw the faces of the preboarded aristocrats in business class. But before I could glare at them with proletarian rage and envy, I heard a loud bang and felt a sharp pain on the top of my head. Everyone looked to see what the sound was; even the two flight attendants milling around the galley broke off their no-doubt-vital conversation.

The source of the preflight disturbance? I'd smacked my head on a television set that hung from the ceiling above the center aisle, which hadn't been stowed for boarding. I lifted my hand to my scalp and drew back a palm glistening with fresh blood.

The response from the flight attendants? A shrug from one and the faint hint of a chuckle from the other. They went back to their conversation. Dumbfounded, I proceeded to my seat to nurse my head wound, fuming over the fact that customer service at even the most rancid highway rest stop requires providing a moist towelette for head wounds.

It's not the worst flight-from-hell story I've heard. Heck, it's not even my worst flight-from-hell story. So what's my point?

Well, for starters, it's a small reminder that flying before 9/11 was already awful, and it has only become worse. In the U.S., the number of people boarding airplanes last year fell 6.3% -- and in talking to people, it quickly becomes obvious that the drop in air travel is not entirely related to the economy.

A couple of weeks ago, an idiot walked the wrong way through a secure exit for arriving passengers at Newark airport. An entire terminal was shut down so that everybody on the "sterile" side of the security barriers could be herded back out and rescreened. The entire process took just under seven hours. The cascading delays disrupted air travel worldwide.

They never caught the doofus who caused the ruckus. No doubt, if they'd announced his location over the paging system, he'd have been drawn and quartered by a mob of traveling salesmen from 3M and a gaggle of middle school girls returning from a softball tournament.

Now, I should back up. When I referred to the "sterile" side of the security barrier, I was using the term narrowly, to refer to folks who'd been through the metal detectors. Because to use the word sterile in its usual context in the same sentence as airports -- those belching Petri dishes of bathroom effluence and unidentifiable noisome miasma -- would be a grotesque abrogation of journalistic trust.

According to the latest epidemiological research, airports reside somewhere between no-frills Haitian brothels and Penn State fraternity bathrooms when it comes to hygiene. USA Today recently surveyed the health inspection records of airport restaurants and found that serious code violations were as commonplace as rat and mouse droppings; 77% of 35 restaurants reviewed at Reagan National Airport had major violations.

I could go on, of course. The petty humiliations, the routine deceptions from airline employees desperate to rid themselves of troublesome travelers ("Oh, they can definitely help you at the gate!"), the stress-position seats, the ever-changing rules for what can and cannot be in your carry-on, being charged for food that the Red Cross would condemn if it were served at Gitmo: Air travel is the most expensive unpleasant experience in everyday life outside the realm of words ending in -oscopy.

And speaking of unwelcome intrusions, the current debate over the "underwear bomber" is important and necessary, but it is detached from basic reality. To listen to the experts, the only relevant choice is between privacy and security. But the average person already understands that privacy is something you have to compromise to fly. The white zone has been for unloading your civil liberties for generations.

This isn't to say that retaining what's left of our privacy isn't an important priority. But I for one would gladly sacrifice more privacy in exchange for more decency and efficiency. As it stands, Shlomo Dror, an Israeli air security expert, had it right in 2002 when he said: "The United States does not have a security system; it has a system for bothering people." ●

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751 Shady Lake Lane	$2,300,000
290 John's Island Drive	$2,300,000
20 Dove Shell Lane	$2,300,000
561 Sea Oak Drive	$2,450,000
389 Island Creek Drive	$2,450,000
90 Dove Plum Road	$2,600,000
120 Sago Palm Road	$2,750,000
275 Coconut Palm Road	$2,800,000
400 Indian Harbor Road	$2,850,000
381 Sea Oak Drive	$2,940,000
180 Orchid Way	$2,950,000
220 Indian Harbor Road	$2,950,000
311 Llwyd's Lane	$2,995,000
140 North Shore Point	$3,400,000
150 Clarkson Lane	$3,650,000
241 Sea Oak Drive	$3,690,000
35 Waxmyrtle Way	$3,750,000
360 Palmetto Point	$3,850,000
310 Island Creek Drive	$3,995,000
228 Island Creek Drive	$4,050,000
380 Island Creek Drive	$4,100,000
640 Indian Harbor Road	$4,450,000
330 Palmetto Point	$4,650,000
391 Sabal Palm Lane	$4,750,000
664 Ocean Road	$5,750,000
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#118.....$190,000
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#120.....$199,500
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#251.....$248,000
#151.....$230,588*
#210.....$287,500
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500 Beach Road #210, 2BR/2BA.....$795,000
850 Beach Road #178, 2BR/2BA.....$905,000
700 Beach Road #158, 3BR/2BA.....$975,000
1000 Beach Road #297, 2BR/2BA.....$995,000
950 Beach Road #193, 3BR/2BA.....$1,000,000
850 Beach Road #277, 2BR/2BA.....$1,200,000
900 Beach Road #285, 2BR/2BA.....$1,260,000
500 Beach Road #203, 3BR/2BA.....$1,275,000
900 Beach Road #382, 2BR/2BA.....$1,290,000
1000 Beach Road #396, 2BR/2BA.....$1,290,000
500 Beach Road #104, 3BR/2BA.....$1,300,000
800 Beach Road #172, 3BR/3BA.....$1,350,000
300 Ocean Road #1E, 3BR/3BA.....$1,400,000
700 Beach Road #148, 3BR/2BA.....$1,400,000
700 Beach Road #149, 3BR/2BA.....$1,400,000
500 Beach Road #211, 3BR/2BA.....$1,550,000
500 Beach Road #311, 3BR/3BA.....$1,600,000
1000 Beach Road #294, 3BR/3BA.....$1,600,000
250 Ocean Road #3C, 3BR/3BA.....$1,600,000
850 Beach Road #375, 3BR/4.5BA.....$2,275,000
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700 Beach Road #250
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110 Coconut Palm Road
241 Sundial Court
750 Beach Road #303
381 Sabal Palm Lane
650 Indian Harbor Road
401 Indian Harbor Road
511 Sea Oak Drive
103 Island Creek Drive
130 Sago Palm Road
500 Beach Road #109
100 Ocean Road #212
250 Ocean Road #2C
1000 Beach Road #295
850 Beach Road #375
381 Sea Oak Drive
430 Coconut Palm Road
291 Sabal Palm Lane
281 Sea Oak Drive
950 Beach Road #391
321 Island Creek Drive
400 Ocean Road #183
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Amid recession, some college admiss

BY STEVEN BRINT, WASHINGTON POST

In these agonizing months between the completion of college applications and the arrival of the first envelopes in the spring, many high school seniors and their parents are speculating about whether the economic downturn will harm their chances of admission to one of the nation's top colleges and universities.

But a few well-to-do parents I know have confessed their hope that hard times and declining endowments may have improved their children's chances of admission, as colleges look for full-paying freshmen.

Before the recession, most of America's wealthiest and most selective colleges and universities were following policies designed to increase the numbers of low- and moderate-income students on their campuses. First, they evaluated applications without consideration of parents' ability to pay, a practice known as "need blind" admissions.

Second, if students qualified for financial aid, many of these colleges promised to meet their full demonstrated need.

But while about two dozen of the country's top-tier colleges and universities -- schools such as Harvard and Princeton, Williams and Amherst -- are maintaining these policies and, in a few cases, expanding their financial commitments to low- and moderate-income students, at schools just below this tier, admissions are becoming more "need aware."

These schools are now making some admissions decisions with an eye to an applicant's ability to pay, and some are unofficially reserving new seats for those who can pay full freight.

Meanwhile, the top public universities -- the Chapel Hills, Ann Arbors and Berkeleys -- are moving to enroll larger numbers of out-of-state students, who pay higher tuition and therefore tend to be wealthier than in-state students.

Of course, wealthy families have always enjoyed an advantage at the top colleges. In the 1950s, Arthur Howe, the admissions director at Yale, calculated that at least two-thirds of Yale's students would need to pay their full way for the university to meet its financial obligations.

Today, many institutions provide scholarship aid to more than a third of their incoming classes -- at Princeton nearly half receive financial aid -- but admits are, as a group, still much wealthier than the general population.

SAT scores are strongly correlated to family income, so an admissions policy that favors high scores means a large proportion of students whose parents can pay $50,000 a year. High-income families can also support activities, such as playing violin with the city orchestra, that make for impressive applications.

And need-blind colleges and universities are not necessarily wealth blind. As Daniel Golden reported in his 2006 book, "The Price of Admission," some schools, such as Duke, have long made space in each class for "developmental admits" -- students who wouldn't be accepted but for wealthy parents or grandparents who might donate large sums to the school.

Still, in recent years the top three to four dozen private colleges and universities tried to enroll diverse classes and to meet the financial needs of all their students.

This wasn't cheap -- by the early 2000s, tuition had become so expensive that even families earning as much as $180,000 a year were qualifying for financial aid grants-- but, in the boom times before the economic crisis, when endowments were growing by as much as 8 percent a year, institutions could afford it.

The situation has changed. As C. Anthony Broh, a higher-education consultant who has advised private colleges and universities on their admissions and financial aid policies, told me, the combination of recent endowment losses (many schools lost hundreds of millions of dollars when their investments plummeted), declines in annual giving and increased need among applicants has placed extraordinary strains on institutions just below the top two dozen.

These colleges and universities, he said, "would like to follow the same practices as the top tier, but cannot afford to do it anymore."

Tufts University's experience offers a prime exam-

ions policies look at students' wealth

ple. Admissions Director Lee A. Coffin described the situation his staff faced last year in an interview with the Tufts Daily. The admissions committee began deliberations with a need-blind approach, but when 95 percent of the class was full, it had to stop. Tufts had spent its entire financial aid budget. With 850 folders to go, Coffin and his colleagues could admit only the applicants who could pay full fare.

Bowdoin, Brandeis, Carleton, Colby, Grinnell, Middlebury, Reed and Washington University are among the other schools that have recently backed away from need-blind admissions or delayed plans to adopt such policies.

To help make up shortfalls in their financial aid budgets, they have also increased the number of transfer, foreign and waiting-list students they accept, since students in these categories have never been considered on a need-blind basis and, in the case of foreign students, are not usually eligible for aid.

Brandeis, for example, increased by 10 percent the proportion of international students it accepted last year, and senior administrators at Tufts now travel regularly to countries including Mexico and India to build alumni networks that can help recruit full-paying students. Other schools have added seats with the intention of filling them with transfer, international and wait-listed students who do not require aid.

Well-endowed Columbia University, which admits domestic students on a need-blind basis, is adding 50 seats to its fall 2010 freshman class. One can't help but wonder: Will these slots be filled by full-fare international students?

Meanwhile, the top public universities are admitting more out-of-state applicants, who pay higher tuition than in-state students and are not eligible for state-funded financial aid programs. The University of Michigan and the University of Virginia were two pioneers in this practice, and today about a third of their classes come from out of state.

At Michigan, upper-division students from elsewhere pay about $37,000 in tuition -- only a few thousand dollars less than at a top private university. Non-resident tuition at the University of Virginia is not far behind.

"We support many forms of diversity, geographic diversity among them," Virginia's dean of admission, Greg Roberts, told me. These out-of-state students don't just offer different perspectives, however: The tuition they pay covers 1 1/2 times the cost of their education.

All this can come at the cost of heightened social tension on campus. Tom Mortenson, an Iowa resident and a higher-education policy analyst who writes the newsletter Postsecondary Education Opportunity, told me that Iowa City has changed as the University of Iowa looks beyond state lines for a larger share of its student body. (Iowa enrolls the highest proportion of out-of-state students, 48 percent, of any large public university.)

"Students from Illinois brought truckloads of money. Suddenly, the streets were full of cars that were newer than those of the faculty. We brought in a bunch of rich kids, who partied and drank and got into trouble with the police," Mortenson said. "This isn't what public higher education is supposed to be about."

The budget crisis at the University of California has people wondering whether the UC campuses should follow the path pioneered by Michigan. Berkeley is already trying. Stunned by a more than $100 million funding cut, Berkeley will increase its share of full-paying out-of-state students from around 10 percent to more than 20 percent in one year, hoping to make as much as $15 million in the process.

Elsewhere, a few private institutions, such as Amherst College, continue to work hard to increase their proportion of students from low- and moderate-income families. In a recent interview, Anthony Marx, Amherst's president, told me that the school is motivated by a sense of social responsibility.

"The big national question is: What do you do to make great education accessible to talented students whose families are not wealthy?" he said. "As a country, we have moved in the opposite direction. We won't see the full damage for a generation, and by that time the leaders and politicians who made the prior choices will be long gone." ●

SUICIDE, SEX AND SUVS

BY ROBERT J. SAMUELSON, Washington Post

You may think that the last place to find a portrait of a nation is a book full of numbers. But turn to page 673 of the Statistical Abstract of the United States, and you find these intriguing figures. About three quarters of Americans (76.1 percent in 2007, to be exact) get to work by driving alone.

Only 10.4 percent carpool, while 4.9 percent use public transportation and 2.8 percent walk. On average, Americans spend 25.3 minutes commuting each way. The state with the longest average commuting time is New York, at 31.5 minutes; the states with the shortest are North and South Dakota at about 16 minutes, followed closely by Montana and Nebraska at 17.6.

I confess to being an avid fan of the Statistical Abstract, published annually by the Census Bureau, because it tells so much so quickly. The just-published 2010 edition, as always, bulges with information. For me, the Stat Abstract is often the first go-to source for a story, because it substitutes evidence for speculation. How do we compare with other countries? Sometimes favorably; sometimes not.

Being optimistic, Americans commit suicide at fairly low rates, 10.2 for every 100,000 people in 2004, less than the 11.9 average for all industrial countries or Japan's 20.3 and France's 15.1.

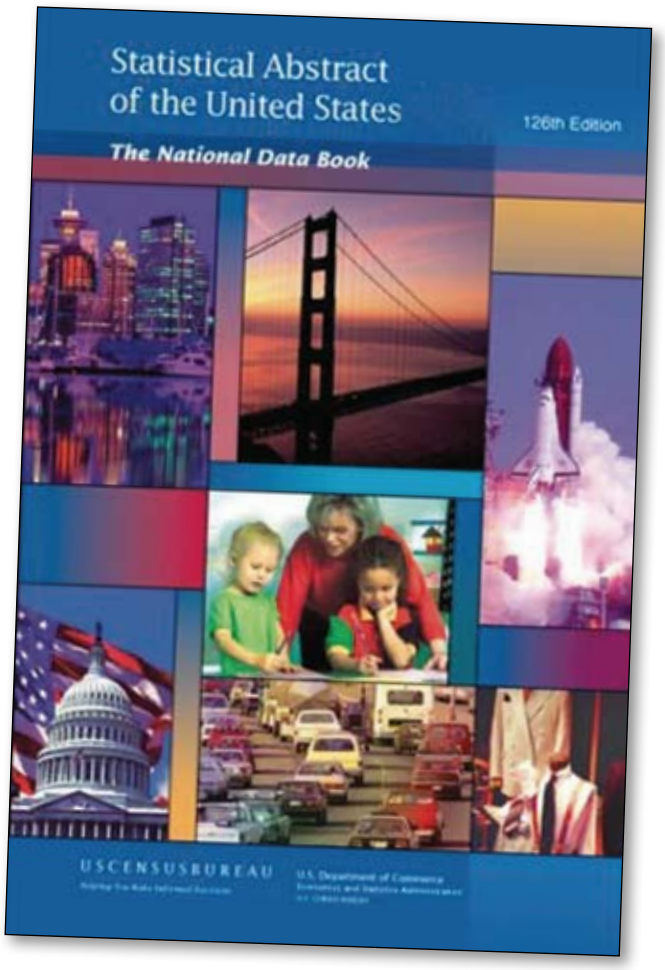
Food is cheaper here than almost anywhere else. In 2007, only about 6.9 percent of U.S. consumer spending went for food at home; Germans spent more (11.4 percent), as did Italians (14.5 percent) and Mexicans (24.2 percent). On the other hand, low food prices may contribute to Americans' obesity. In 2006, about 34 percent of U.S. adults were judged obese, triple France's rate (10.5 percent) and four times Switzerland's (7.7 percent).

The United States may be the birthplace of feminism, but that's not obvious from global figures. In 2009, women were 16.8 percent of the U.S. House of Representatives. In other national legislatures, women did better. For Canada, the comparable figure was 22.1 percent; for the Netherlands, 41.3 percent. The United States was roughly on a par with Uzbekistan's 17.5 percent.

Considering today's economic slump, America may seem a land where progress has died. Not so. The Statistical Abstract offers many counterexamples. Crime is perhaps the best. Two decades ago, governments seemed helpless against a rising tide of murders, assaults, and drug deals. Then crime began to subside. From 1993 to 2007, murders dropped from 25,000 to 17,000, rapes from 103,000 to 90,000, and robberies from 660,000 to 445,000.

Crime rates per 100,000 declined more, because the population rose 16 percent over the same period. There is no consensus as to why. But crime still remains serious, especially for the young: in 2007, 18 percent of high-school students reported carrying a weapon sometime in the previous year.

Other portents of progress? Smoking continues to decline, from 25.3 percent of adults in 1990 to 19.7 percent in 2007. Five-year survival rates for cancer are up: from 62.4 percent in 1990–92 to 69.1 percent in 1999–2005 for whites; and from 48.2 percent to 59.4 percent for blacks.



Voting is also up; the turnout of 57.1 percent in 2008 was the highest since 1968. Garbage per person has stabilized; it was 4.5 pounds per day in 1990 and 4.6 pounds in 2007. Mostly, the Statistical Abstract instructs about how we're living and changing. By 2050, the U.S. population is projected to be almost 440 million, up from 304 million in 2008. Almost one quarter of elementary- and high-school students are immigrants or have immigrant parents. In 2007, the average American spent 1,613 hours watching TV, the equivalent of 67 days. From 1980 to 2007, the number of pickup trucks, vans, and SUVs almost quadrupled to 101.5 million, while the number of cars rose only 12 percent to 135.9 million.

And sex? The Stat Abstract has that, too. Among men 15–44, the median number of lifetime sexual partners is 5.4. Almost a quarter of men (22.6 percent) say they've had 15 or more partners. Among women, the median number of partners is 3.3, and almost a 10th (9.2 percent) say they've had 15 or more partners. The Stat Abstract provides a flood tide of facts. But how we interpret, discuss, and debate them is the stuff of democracy. ●

STORY BY ALINA LAMBIET, STAFF WRITER
PHOTO BY TOM MCCARTHY JR.

Scott Varricchio and a rendering of what the finished Citrus Grillhouse will look like.

‘Exciting time’ as Citrus Grillhouse rushes to open at Ocean Park

An oceanfront dream is slowly taking shape across from Humiston Park.

There, just beneath the penthouse of the Ocean Park complex still under construction, Scott Varricchio has a plan for a restaurant that will offer top-style gourmet food with an unpretentious attitude.

His vision, facing a million dollar ocean view, is to see a seaside American bistro across from the park that will offer locals, tourists and families visiting beachside a place to eat well, bring the kids or alternately serve as a great dining destination for a night on the town.

“We see our restaurant as a place that if you want to grab a burger, you can have a great burger. But if you want a really great meal, you can have that too,” Varricchio said from the cavernous interior of the Citrus Grillhouse, his latest project, a bistro still under construction.

Varricchio walks around the site like a kid in a candy store. Here’s where the bar will be he points – mahogany, with beveled mirrors behind it -- near the entrance. He wants an open kitchen. “It’s more fun for the staff and for the patrons.” He sees no white tablecloths. “They lead to pretense.” He wants nothing to turn anyone away from his idea of a fine dining experience at a good price.

“It’ll be butcher block tables. Clean. Simple. Accessible,” says Varricchio. “We want people to just come in and enjoy themselves,” he says.

How this New York chef landed on the shores of Vero is nothing short of a small miracle. A native of Ithaca, N.Y., Varricchio was well entrenched in New York’s dining scene as executive sous chef of two restaurants, Ouest (a French –American bistro) and Cesca (Italian cuisine) both in the Upper West Side, both owned by his long-time friend Chef Tom Valenti.

Before that, Varricchio and Valenti had teamed up in a variety of restaurant ventures. Varricchio also did a stint in Las Vegas’ Bellagio at its five-star Piccasso.

But when Varricchio was invited to come to Vero for the Treasure Coast Wine Festival in 2005, he happened to meet Allison Ritter, an event organizer. Her parents spent time in New York and in John’s Island.

The next year, invited again to the festival, Ritter and Varricchio hit it off. Her parents needed a chef to occasionally throw dinner parties at their John’s Island home, and Varricchio found himself flying here on many weekends for love and work. The rest, as they say, is history.

Now, 30 months later, there’s a new marriage, and a life together that includes Allison’s 8 and 11 year old girls and the newest addition, their 4-month-old son. They are his inspiration as he makes his first foray into Vero Beach’s dining scene – and as he cooks up sample dishes for his menu, they are his official food tasters.

“It’s an exciting time to do this,” Varricchio says. “I know people will love the place, the food. It’s going to be special.”

The restaurant’s best feature, by anyone’s opinion is the magnificent location, which will feature oceanside seating under a covered veranda.

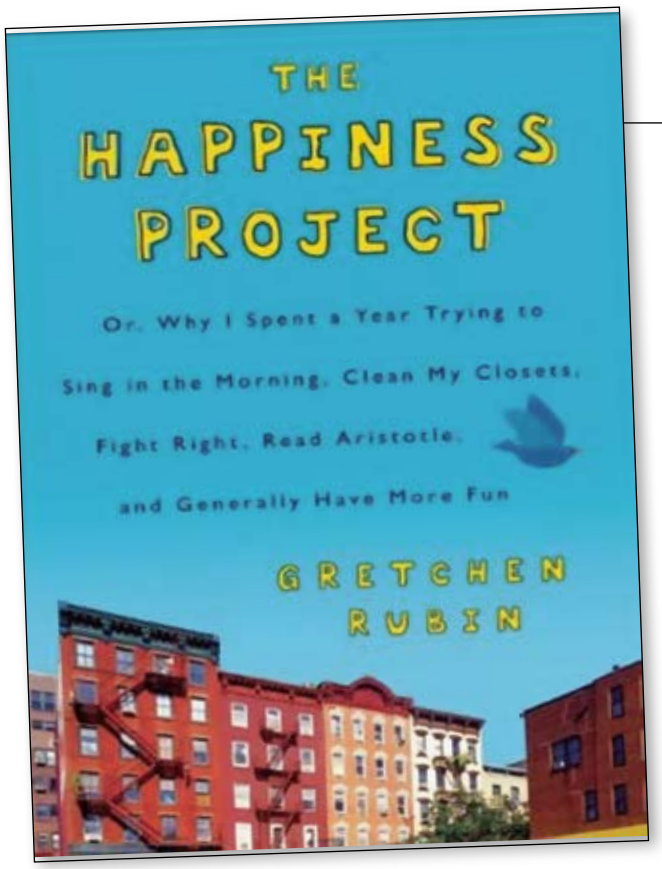
The space, which was purchased by a half dozen investors who is backing Varricchio for $1.6 million, will seat (inside and outside) an estimated 160 people. A focal point will be a rotunda in the center of the room under a lit tray ceiling that will have 4 to 5 tables.

Although the menu is still in the works, Varricchio promises lots of variety – and lots of locally grown foods, including greens. He’ll use local fish as much as possible, too. Nothing endangered – he just won’t serve it, he says.

“I really enjoy eating what’s in season here,” he says. His entrees will be in the low $20s, with specials at a slightly higher price point.

If construction goes well, he hopes to be open in late February or early March. He doesn’t worry that it will be mid-season by then or that several other restaurants have opened in recent weeks.

“I’m not concerned at all,” Varricchio says. “I think this is the best location in town and with the improvements at Humiston Park, it’s going to bring people here.” ●



Before I even finished the book, I had already preordered multiple copies of Gretchen Rubin's latest title, The Happiness Project: Or, Why I Spent a Year Trying to Sing in the Morning, Clean My Closets, Fight Right, Read Aristotle, and Generally Have More Fun.

Which means if you're looking for an enlightening, laugh-aloud read, get the book and forget the rest of this review. If you need more convincing, let me count the monthly ways....

Gretchen Rubin already had a pretty good life. She's married to the man of her dreams, has two "delightful" daughters, is a bestselling author with a Yale law degree, is healthy, and lives in her favorite city surrounded by supportive family and friends.

But she's also prone to misbehavior that undermines her well-being: she loses her temper over trivial things, and fights melancholy and insecurity, not to mention that unshakable guilt.

One morning on a city bus, Rubin had a startling epiphany: Asking herself what she really wanted, her answer seemed simple: "I want to be happy."

Like most of us, she "had never thought about what made [her] happy or how [she] might be happier." But unlike most of us, she actually figured out how: "I decided to dedicate a year to trying to be happier." Rubin assures us, "I wanted to change my life without changing my life, by finding more happiness in my own kitchen."

First she planned and prepared. She compiled her own "Twelve Commandments," which begins with the all-important "Be Gretchen," and her "goofier list" of "Secrets of Adulthood," which includes tried-and-tested gems like, "By doing a little bit each day, you can get a lot accomplished," and Luddite-loving zingers like, "Turning the computer on and off a few times often fixes glitches."

Armed and ready, Rubin set off on her year-long journey. Superbly organized into amusing step-by-step months, "Happiness Project" is a definite success – just reading it will make you happier. Rubin manages to offer plausible, solid suggestions for what worked for her; she's great at navigating that delicate line between "just do this," and "you might want to try that."

As self-help books go, Rubin's works because it's filled with open, honest glimpses into her real life, woven together with constant doses of humor. In January, she sleeps more, exercises better, and cleans out her closets. February is spent working on her marriage: She vows to nag less, fight right, and "not to eat a half pound of M&Ms on an empty stomach."

In March, Rubin focuses on work: She launches what becomes a highly successful blog [www.happiness-project.com], directly e-mails a critical reviewer of one of her books (later having a "very nice conversation" with him at a cocktail party), and writes her own bad (but so funny) reviews for this very title.

April is spent enjoying parenthood's "fog happiness" – "the kind of happiness you get from activities that, closely examined, don't really seem to bring much happiness at all – yet somehow they do."

In May, Rubin learns to have more fun; in June, she nurtures friendships new and old; in July, she decides money spent wisely can buy a little happiness after all; and in August, she empathizes with other people's catastrophes and finds a spiritual master.

In September, she writes a whole novel; October has her trying hypnosis, laughter yoga, and drawing as part of her quest for mindfulness; and in November, she adjusts her attitude to laugh more (small children laugh 400 times per day, but adults just 17 times).

By December, she goes all out for "Boot Camp Perfect," fails every single day, but proudly, happily resolves to keep trying.

So is Rubin happier by the year's end? Absolutely. She has Four Splendid Truths and her Resolutions Chart, not to mention those Twelve Commandments and Secrets to Adulthood that guarantee she'll live happily ever after.

By the way, as Rubin explains, goals and resolutions are different: "You hit a goal, you keep a resolution." You complete the goal of reading this book, you keep your resolution to sing every morning to set the goofy tone that will happily permeate throughout your day. Now that's the kind of New Year's resolution we can all keep! ●

The Happiness Project by Gretchen Rubin
Harper, 320 pp., $25.99
Reviewed by Terry Hong, Christian Science Monitor

We can live without art, but we can't live without architecture. At the most basic level we need enclosure -- from the rain and the cold and the heat. But we also need safe, healthy places in which to worship, work, learn, rest.

Architectural theorists used to try to distinguish architecture from mere building. The British critic John Ruskin famously identified architecture with decoration or, as he said, whatever was "useless" to the building. Then modernists came along and declared that ornament was a crime and that architecture was nothing more nor less than the perfect expression of its utility.

In the past few decades the pendulum has swung back toward an ideal of excess, as celebrity architects follow the money across the globe and build signature works in Dallas or Beijing or Berlin.

With new technologies of construction and digital means of design, along with a sufficient budget, these architects can create buildings that look like robots or waves or almost anything, ever increasing the gulf between their rare confections and the mere buildings in which you or I spend most of our lives.

These two decidedly undogmatic books bring us back down to earth, helping us understand architecture as an art of experience and use that is woven into the very fabric of human existence.

Paul Goldberger is America's preeminent public critic of architecture, and his wise, compassionate "Why Architecture Matters" sums up a lifetime spent exploring, reflecting and writing.

Some of the most affecting parts of the book are drawn from his deeply personal experience, growing up in the lively streetscape of 1950s Passaic, N.J., sojourning in the architectural wonderland of Yale University, and coming to terms with the construction and destruction of the Twin Towers.

Architecture has always mattered to him. Why to the rest of us? In the early heyday of modernism, architecture mattered because it seemed to promise decent housing, accessible recreation and improved public health for all.

With the collapse of so many of these dreams, and devastating critiques of social engineering coming from both left and right, today's technocrats focus instead on energy use. By some estimates, half of all carbon emissions come from the power needed to light, heat and cool buildings. Solving the climate problem therefore requires fundamentally rethinking how we design, construct and use buildings.

However urgent these social and environmental agendas may be, they are not Goldberger's subject. Ultimately, the best architecture expresses the "human aspiration that makes us want to connect to what has come before, to make of it something different and our own, and to speak to those who will follow us."

While the book has a useful glossary of terms at the end, it is not a primer on style or even architecture appreciation.

Goldberger does discuss the familiar aesthetic categories of form and space, solid and void, compression and release, in a series of sensitive accounts of some favorite buildings. But as he assembles the building blocks of architectural criticism, he uses them to explore the paradoxes and dilemmas of architecture as well.

Buildings are made for one moment in time but soon outlast their original purpose and context, yet they can't be thrown into a closet like an old dress or painting. They are transformed by use and memory and new construction all around them, while preservationists try to hold on to them or some aspect of them.

What is the proper balance between conservation and renewal? How do we maintain the architectural values of community against the forces of sprawl, privatization, real estate speculation and, now, digital networking, which is replacing physical encounters in real space with electronic encounters in cyberspace?

Goldberger does not prescribe solutions but argues passionately that architecture must continue to define our place in the world in a way that "startles us and comforts us at the same time."

Edward Hollis's "Secret Lives of Buildings" starts from the paradox that all architecture, no matter how monumental or "timeless," is shape-shifting and impermanent. Every building is literally made and remade by its users, in a never-ending process of change in which "each alteration is a 'retelling' of the building as it exists at a particular time."

Hollis knows what he is talking about: He has been in professional practice for years retrofitting older buildings for newer clients. He brings together an iconoclastic attitude and a lively writing style to create a kind of counter-history of architecture, one that starts where the original designers left off and narrates the subsequent biography of the "wonderful and chimeric monsters" that buildings are.

Focusing on 13 stories from the ancient world to the present, Hollis weaves together fantasy and fact to turn each building into something akin to a legend passed down and constantly modified through oral tradition.

As we read deeper into the book, the method in the madness emerges. Hollis reveals the poignancy in quixotic efforts to adapt once-imperious buildings to alien faiths or ideologies, or to turn socially engineered utopias into punk-rock playgrounds, or to hold on to past glories as they disappear into rubble or relics or tourist traps.

Concluding with a vivid account of the disputed remains of the Western Wall in Jerusalem, now caught in the political stalemate between Jews and Muslims, he suggests that the ancient temple endures as much in the ritual of the Sabbath meal as it does in the reality of old stones.

Sometimes, we are led to wonder, the world might be better off with less architecture and more ritual. Place divides us even as it brings us together. ●

Why Architecture Matters by Paul Goldberger
Yale University, 273 pp. $26.
The Secret Lives of Buildings by Edward Hollis
Metropolitan, 338 pp., $28
Both books Reviewed by Kirk Savage, Book World

The last decade or so has been challenging for Robert Stone. In the wake of his 1998 novel, "Damascus Gate" -- a millennial masterpiece set in Jerusalem -- he published two middling books, the novel "Bay of Souls" and the memoir "Prime Green," that may be most noteworthy for what they lack. Both traffic in the classic Stone motifs: God and dope, primarily. And both are suitably apocalyptic, looking at characters (and, in the case of "Prime Green," a counterculture) that have gone off the rails.

But while "Damascus Gate," like earlier Stone novels such as "Dog Soldiers" and "A Flag for Sunrise," revels in its sprawling chaos, "Bay of Souls and "Prime Green" come off as oddly constrained. It's as if Stone had grown weary of his half-century-long immersion with those at the edges of society, as if the burden of his own imagination had become too great.

Stone's new book, "Fun With Problems," may not represent a complete return to form, but it's far more satisfying than "Bay of Souls" or "Prime Green." Gathering seven pieces of short fiction, it is brilliant in places and slack in others, a primer (if you will) of Stone's obsessions that is, by turns, revelatory and raw. As with his 1997 story collection "Bear and His Daughter," some of the material here gives the impression of a writer not quite at ease with the form in which he's working; Stone is no miniaturist, after all.

But if this mars such efforts as "Charm City," with its contrived pickup-turned-crime-drama double narrative, or "From the Lowlands," which suffers from an unnatural compression ("What happened then," Stone writes, encapsulating several years in a fraction of a paragraph, "was Barbara the beautiful . . . beamed herself to Dongo up in Dongoville, California, but she came crawling back after a year and Leroy unwisely married her. Dongo died -- had to happen. Leroy's marriage was brief."), Stone more often evokes a peculiar state of being, fleeting and generally drug-infused, in which we are the architects of our (mis)fortune in a universe that can turn on us at any time.

"From the Lowlands" is a perfect example, a story that explodes in its final moments, becoming not just engaging but also elemental, a matter of life and death in the most literal sense. This is a particular Stone fascination, and throughout "Fun With Problems," he presents a series of apparently mundane circumstances that, with little warning, bare their teeth.

In the title story, a public defender, aging, lonely, only provisionally on the wagon, seduces a younger woman, also fighting to stay sober, and draws her back to drink. "He was the man," Stone tells us, "whose ex-wife had once said of him, 'You don't care whether you even get laid, as long as you can make some woman unhappy.'" She's right, of course, but the measure of the story is how it charts the character's unhappiness, a desperation so all-encompassing that he barely notices it anymore.

A similar dynamic motivates "The Archer," in which a professor-painter named Duffy gets a visiting artist gig at a university on the Gulf of Mexico, only to throw it away when he creates a drunken scene during a dinner with his host professor. Anyone who's ever done the college circuit can understand Duffy's impulse: the desire to get clear of the oppressive sterility of the hotel room, the expectant face of the professor, the ennui of the anonymous Q&A.

Here, however, Stone pushes into unanticipated territory, offering a whisper of redemption, temporary and soiled though it may be. Sitting on the beach, sketching while he waits to leave town, Duffy gets a glimpse of his place in the world. "If all of Stella's good early stuff, all those wild whirling colored lights," he thinks, "was about the teeming overripe possibilities of the coming age, maybe his, Duffy's, was about the exhaustion of those possibilities, the disappearance of that time, the great abridgment of the popular age. The ghost of a century, a show closing down for lack of interest. But, he thought, somebody had to be around to tell that story."

Stone is saying that the universe can turn in both directions and that we need to be ready for the moment of transcendence, if it comes. That it doesn't last is part of the beauty, part of the longing, part of the mystery and the emptiness and the loss.

"It's a fallen world, is it not? We carry love in earthen vessels," he writes in "High Wire," the book's finest (and longest) story, which recounts a screenwriter's doomed love for a drug-addicted actress -- reminiscent, in its way, of Daniel Fuchs' novel "West of the Rockies" and Stone's 1986 Hollywood phantasmagoria "Children of Light." The only first-person piece in the collection, it serves as a metaphor for the high wire on which all of Stone's characters walk.

"In those days," his narrator recalls, "I was confident to the point of arrogance. I assumed I was growing more confident with time. How could I know that the more you knew the more troubled and cautious you became, that introspection cut your speed and endurance?"

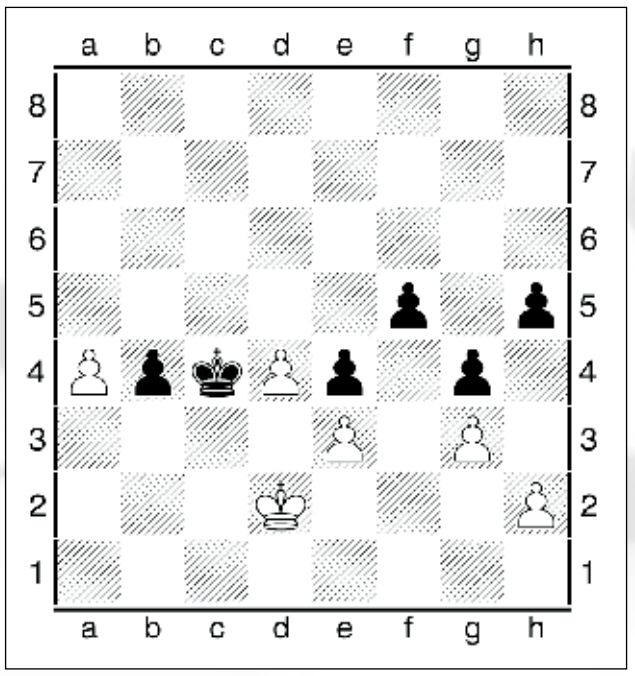
This is what happens in a universe in which meaning is elusive, and knowledge doesn't lead to anything but doubt. In such a place, even survival is a conditional prospect, a momentary high. "There we were," the character reflects, "beautiful Lucy, cultivated me, livers of the examined life, in more or less the same maze. What did it make us?"

What, indeed? That question resides at the heart of Stone's work. We are lost, he means to tells us, and responsible, adrift in a world of our own creation, bereft -- abandoned, even -- by God. How do we respond to such a landscape? To what transitory consolations can we turn? The best stories in "Fun With Problems," like all of Stone's most powerful writing, suggest that the answer is available to us only in fragments, if it is available at all. ●

Fun With Problems by Robert Stone
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 196 pp., $24
Reviewed by David L. Ulin
Los Angeles Times

FOR THE LOVE OF CHESS

By Humberto Cruz - Chess Columnist



It is Black's turn to move. Who is winning? See column at right for answer.

Pawn endings can be the most complex positions in chess

You'd think that the fewer pieces are left on the chess board, the easier it would be to find the correct move. But pawn endings, when each side has only the King and some pawns, are often the most difficult positions to analyze.

In the position in the diagram, which occurred in a game at the Indian River County Chess Club with Black to move, several club members thought White was winning because of its two passed pawns on a4 and d4 (a passed pawn is one that cannot be stopped by an enemy pawn on its way to the queening square). But in reality, Black has a forced and beautiful win by crashing through first with …f4!, threatening …f3.

If White answers with exf4, the Black pawn on e4 becomes passed. By synchronizing their advance, the Black pawns on e4 and b4 would then beat out White's passed pawns. (For an instructive exercise, try it out). The key point in many variations is that Black queens his pawn first or with check.

In the actual game, after Black played …f4, White replied gxf4 and Black continued with …h4!, with the unstoppable threat of …g3, which creates a decisive passed pawn.

Congratulations if you saw that, from the position in the diagram, Black can win several other ways, including by playing …h4 right away rather than …f4 first. A possible continuation after …h4 would be gxh4 f4, exf4 b3! White then cannot stop both the Black pawns on b3 and e4.

Humberto Cruz is a United States Chess Federation correspondence chess master and certified tournament director. He can be reached at askhumberto@aol.com.

THE BRIDGE COLUMN

By Pieter Vanbennekom - Bridge Columnist

Flustered Flo was frustrated at a recent pairs tournament when she tied for bottom on a fantastic board. She bid 6 Hearts and made 7, as did almost every other pair playing the hand. But there was one pair, headed by her nemesis Smug Sam, that actually bid and made the Grand Slam.

Flo had the South hand and her partner Loyal Larry was North. East-West vulnerable; South Dealer.

The bidding:	South	West	North	East
	1 Heart	Pass	2 Spades	Pass
	3 Hearts	Pass	4 Hearts	Pass
	4 No-Trump	Pass	5 Hearts	Pass
	6 Hearts	All pass		

Opening lead: 4 of Clubs.

Flo had a quandary on the final bid. Since her partner Larry had bid Spades, she was pretty sure he had the Aces of Spades, but which other one did he have? If he had the Ace of Clubs, which she didn't need because she was void in Clubs, she'd be in trouble because she might lose up to two Diamond Tricks (at least one). But if Larry had the Diamond Ace, she'd have 6 Hearts cold and likely 7, counting on opportunities for sloughing on the expected long Spade suit and/or a finesse on the King of Diamonds. Of course she made 7 pretty routinely.

Flo was very curious as to how Smug Sam had been confident enough to bid the Grand Slam? How did he know which Ace his partner had?

"Oh, that was easy," Sam told her smugly. "We happened to use key card bidding, but we could have gotten there another way, too." Now Flo's head was really spinning. There was even more than one way to get to the desired end result when she hadn't been able to find a single one?

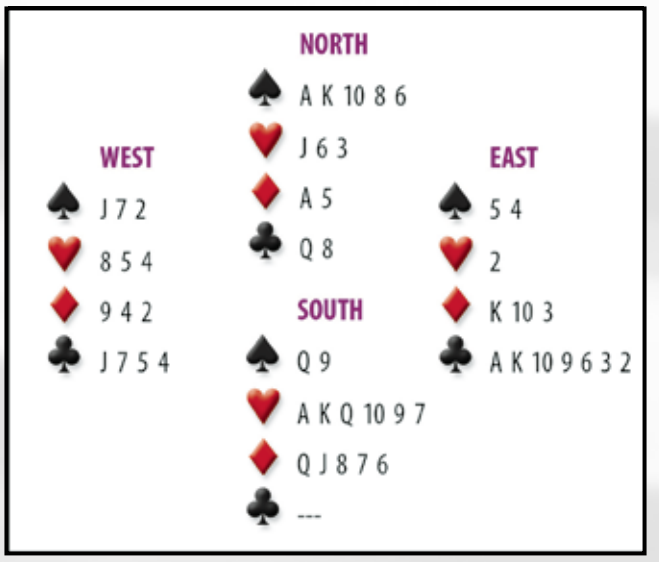
"Here's how we did it," Sam said. "After my 1 Heart opening, my partner raised to a forcing 3 Spades, taking over the initiative. When I bid 4 Clubs to indicate my Ace of Clubs (the void amounted to the same thing), he asked for Aces and confidently bid 7 Hearts knowing I had Clubs stopped." "And you said there was another way?" Flo asked.

"Yeah, the Acol system," Sam explained patiently. "It's very popular overseas. After asking for Aces, I'd bid 6 Clubs to indicate Club control. If my partner happened to have the Ace of Clubs, he'd know we'd have problems with Diamonds so he'd escape to 6 Hearts. But since he had the Diamond Ace, he'd raise to 7 Hearts."

"Isn't all that way too risky?" asked Flo, still a little flustered.

"Not if you know what you're doing," Sam replied.

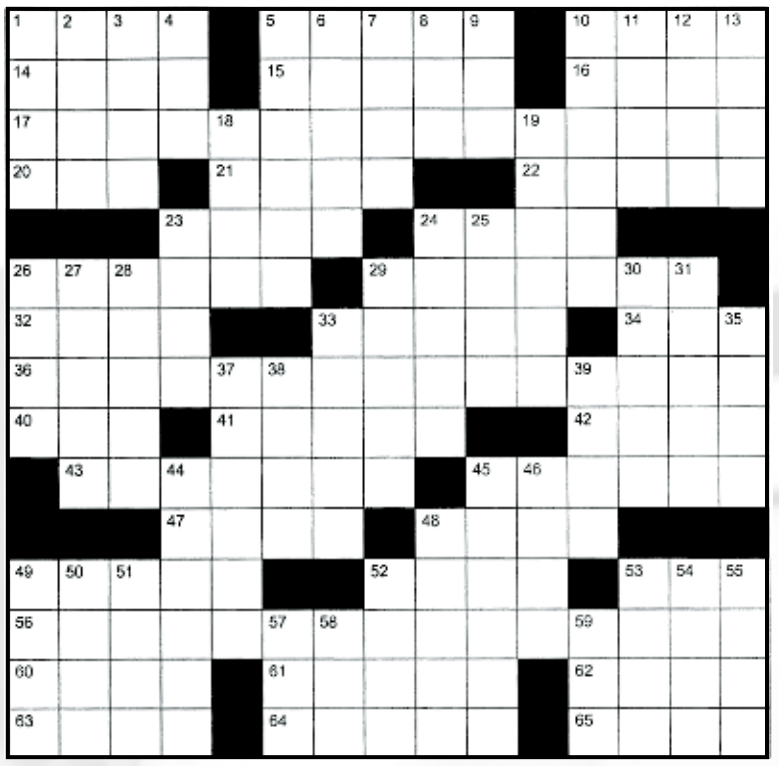
Key card bidding to find specific Aces



Crossword

SOLUTIONS TO LAST ISSUE ON PAGE 75

IN THE WOODS



The Christian Science Monitor | By Joe Cunningham | Edited by Charles Preston

ACROSS

1 Shepard forte
5 Business
10 Boat, of sorts
14 Excellent
15 Belonging to inventor Elias
16 Hipbones
17 Occurs to
20 Understanding
21 Biblical brother
22 Insects
23 Slapstick props
24 Discomfort
26 Seasonal songs
29 Inhuman
32 French friends
33 Tropical animal
34 Travel term
36 N.Y. locale
40 Animal revered in ancient times
41 Sycophant
42 "Bus Stop" playwright
43 At no place
45 City in Ohio
47 Command: arch.
48 Punctilious person
49 English forest
52 Bumpkin
53 Nigerian native
56 Timberland tracts
60 Of grandparents
61 Regions
62 Particles
63 Confederates
64 Simpletons
65 Celebes ox

DOWN

1 Scout group
2 Knowledge
3 Shortly
4 Vote
5 Ancient Greek city
6 The War of the ___
7 Mil. misdemeanor
8 Home
9 Compass pt.
10 Adriatic port
11 Came to rest
12 Punish
13 Young boys
18 Spinnaker
19 Metals workers
23 Elegant
24 Kimono flower
25 Italian city
26 Summer destination
27 Mightily
28 A Beatle
29 Grass or oar
30 ___-garde
31 Dialect
33 Show surprise
35 Yemen's gulf
37 Rival of 5 Down
38 Digits
39 Ocean fish
44 Potters' needs
45 La ___, Wis.
46 Helper
48 Requests
49 At a distance
50 Be footloose
51 Colorless
52 Canadian Indian
53 Lake near Erie
54 Nev. metropolis
55 Greek peak
57 Running game
58 With caution or pay
59 Narrow inlet

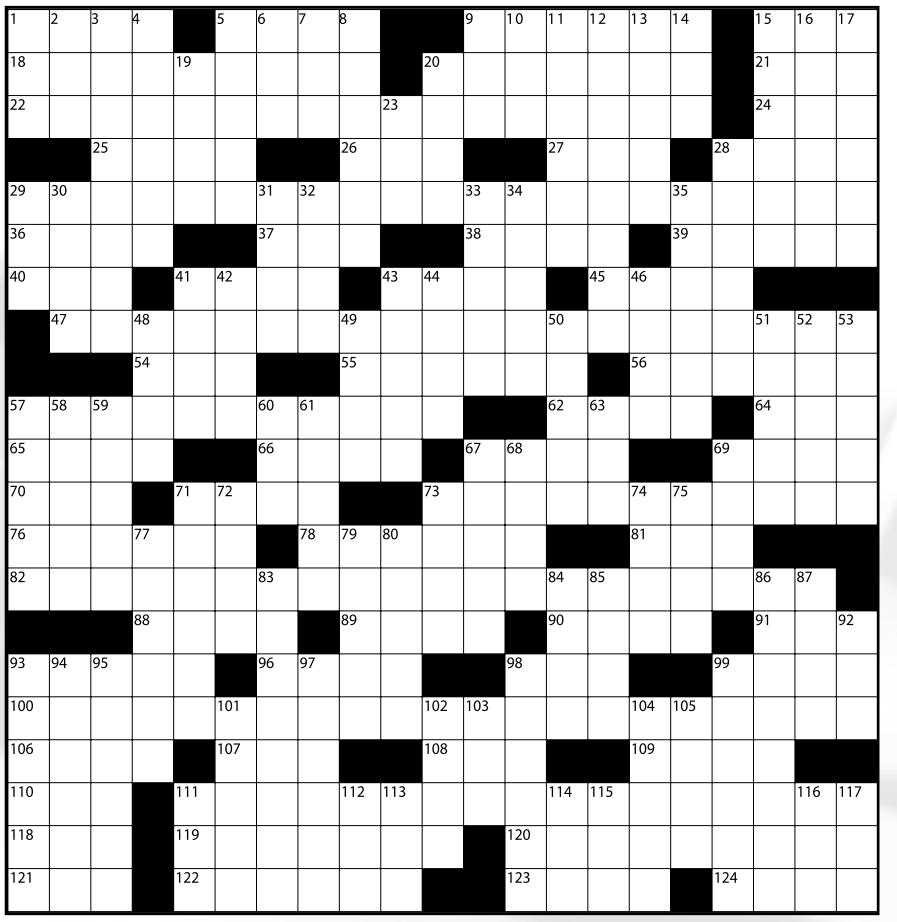
Sudoku

By Ben Arnoldy The Christian Science Monitor

3			6			5		
		6	4					9
			7	8		6		
7						9		
9			8			3		6
6		5			2	4		8
		8						
			5					
		1	2	6			4	7

★★★★☆

How to do Sudoku:
Fill in the grid so the numbers 1 through 9 appear just once in every column, row and three-by-three square. See example (right).



DOING 60

By Merl Reagle

NOTE: *This puzzle goes out to all of us who are right around the corner from a certain age.*

ACROSS

1 Singer of "Inchworm" on film
5 Put to flight
9 Oracle site
15 Echolocation user
18 Symbols of opportunity
20 Night lights
21 Egg opening
22 60 = ___
24 Barrel wood
25 Toils in soil
26 1992 Earth Summit site
27 Little Caesar's piece
28 Fit for duty
29 60 = ___
36 Leopold's co-defendant
37 Arg. belongs to it
38 Obsessed skipper
39 Low-level laborers
40 ___ good deed
41 Nail to the wall
43 Church section
45 The good earth?
47 60 = ___
54 Colt's fan club?
55 Joseph Campbell's "The Power ___"
56 "Under Siege" star
57 60 = ___ (continues at 73 Across)
62 Strange things floating around
64 "Loser" or "Believer" intro
65 The goldfish in "Pinocchio"
66 Came out of it
67 ___ avis
69 Secluded valley
70 Boxer's measurement
71 Frolic
73 See 57 Across
76 "*Ach du* ___!"
78 Most earthlings
81 Misspell "misspell," e.g.
82 60 = ___
88 Author Ambler
89 Assistant
90 Advice column stuff
91 A Louis
93 Chocolate source
96 A comic reaction?
98 Salt Lake City athlete
99 Weigh station stopper
100 60 = ___
106 Depend
107 Palindromic name
108 Guitar man Fender
109 Model in a bottle
110 Paradise of "On the Road"
111 60 = ___
118 Verb ending?
119 Crunchy bowlful
120 The silent ___
121 Like SpongeBob's tie
122 Vegas strategy
123 Coach's cue, e.g.
124 Track numbers

DOWN

1 Major blows
2 Quick
3 "I heard ya the first time"
4 Bury
5 It goes with a Martini?
6 Typs of pass, with "alley"
7 Clickable address
8 Reason to say "oy, vey!"
9 Behind-the-wheel no-no
10 It follows directions
11 Robert of "Big" and "Jagged Edge"
12 It mentions the words "more perfect"
13 Poker Flat creator Bret
14 Mag. edition
15 Tot's bruise
16 Funicello beachmate
17 Units of appreciation?
19 Like some pockets
20 In ___ (out of it)
23 Greed or envy
28 Energy shortage?
29 Like Glory
30 Spoils
31 Holder you eat
32 Tattered attire
33 Smart's partner?
34 On ___ (secretly)
35 Sudden outpourings
41 Now's partner
42 "Drown in ___ of whiskey? Death, where is thy sting?" (W.C. Fields)
43 Caine's cad
44 Heart, for one
46 ___ buco
48 ___ many words
49 Pet projects in bills
50 Freedom, in Swahili
51 Disney's "Darby ___ and the Little People"
52 To ___ few
53 Sicko or wacko, e.g.
57 Milan's La ___
58 Name of two German saints
59 Hercules slew its lion
60 Personal-ad abbr.
61 Not feeling up ___
63 Music notes
67 Wash cycle
68 Looped handle on a vase
69 Attire
71 Press again
72 The world, in Latin phrases
73 Actress Adams
74 Entrepreneur's entry under "employer"
75 The Police or Green Day
77 ___-eyed
79 Turkish soldier
80 Greek epic
83 Spiny anteaters
84 Salem or Selma
85 One way to start
86 Freed, as from paying a tax
87 Frosty coating
92 Diesel of films
93 Computer pointer
94 Comfortable
95 Picked out
97 "Go away," old-style
98 Letter-shaped fasteners
99 Quake opening
101 Cow palace?
102 Actress Lanchester
103 TV's Fife, for ex.
104 "What a piece of work ___" (Shak.)
105 Beyond repair
111 Classic roadsters
112 Piggy
113 Deciduous tree
114 William Tell's canton
115 Pt. of a line
116 Word with loose or tight
117 USN officers

Puzzle by telegraph.co.uk

3	6		4		9			
				5				
1			6		7			8
	9	8				6	5	
				6				
	7	2				4	1	
2			1		6			5
				2				
			5		3		2	1

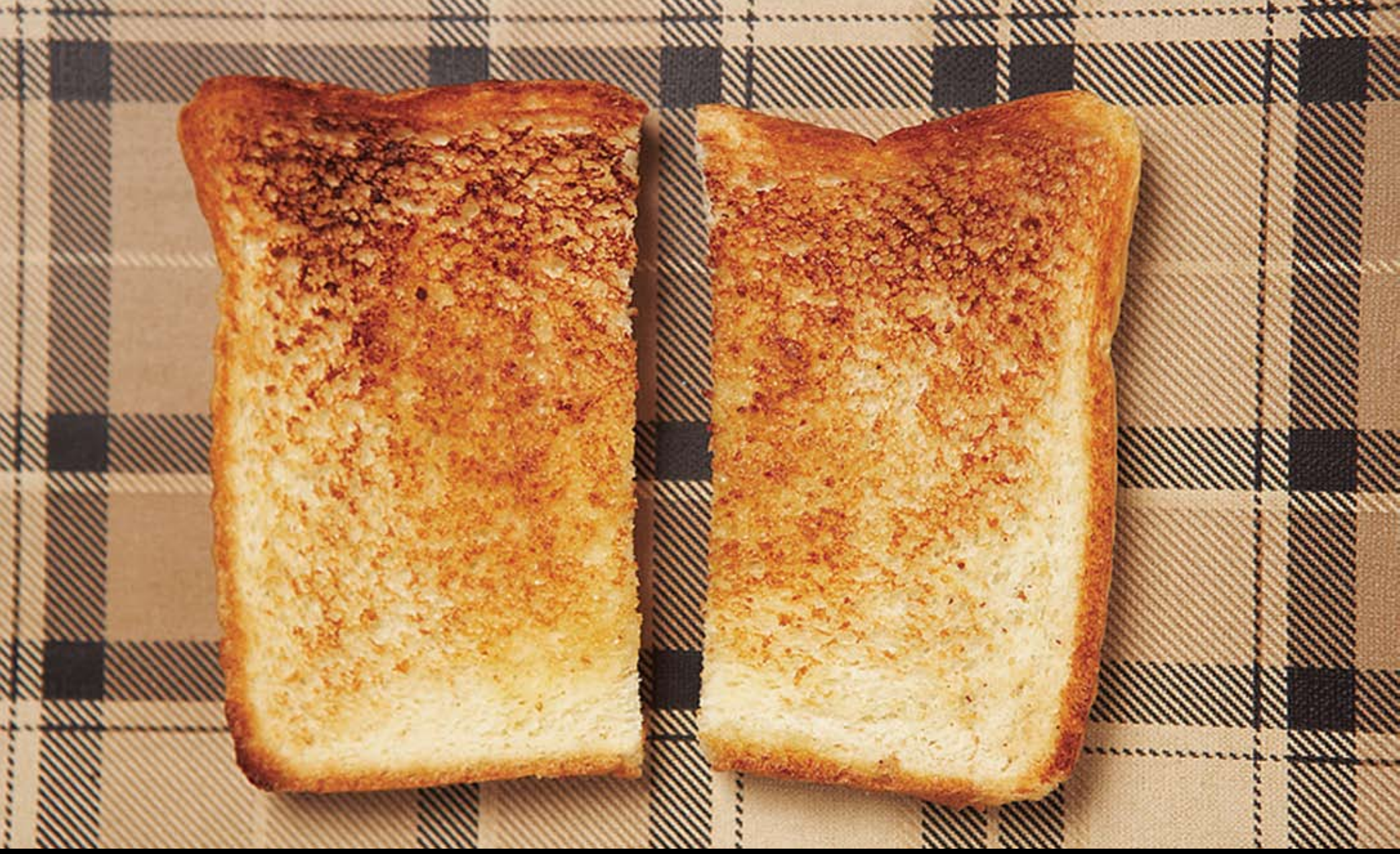
★★★★★

Row →

Three-by-three square →

Column ↕

4	3	2	8	1	6	7	5	9
5	6	9	3	7	4	8	1	2
1	7	8	9	5	2	4	6	3
3	4	7	2	8	5	6	9	1
2	1	6	7	4	9	3	8	5
9	8	5	1	6	3	2	7	4
7	9	1	4	3	8	5	2	6
8	5	3	6	2	1	9	4	7
6	2	4	5	9	7	1	3	8



Tales of a Mechanical Misfit (Part 1)

By Jay McNamara

Somewhere deep within my technological clock, there is a ticking sound indicating it is time to buy a new computer. To someone severely challenged in this area, its a daunting prospect. Considering that I recently coped with the purchase of a new toaster, I am fearful of the task.

Growing up, we had one, and only one, toaster. It had side doors that swung open from top to bottom like wings. You placed a slice of bread on the open door and swung the door back up. There was a button to push to start the toaster. The machine lacked any timing or sensory device to determine when the bread was toasted. It relied on the judgment of the user.

There were many mornings when I awoke to the smell of burning toast. Getting the toast to come out right was a learned skill. Mostly, we repeatedly opened and closed the door of the toaster to see how things were progressing.

This extended the time of toasting since opening the door turned off the filaments that did the work. You could see the bright red color fading as you checked the color of the bread. Not done yet. This process continued until either you accepted an under toasted slice out of frustration or you waited too long and achieved black toast.

It wasn't unusual to end up scraping off the charcoal crust from the bread in order to achieve an edible product. If you were using both sides of the toaster to cook two slices, the problem was complicated by the fact that one side worked better and faster than the other.

Important in the scheme of things was the fact that the toaster only toasted one side of the bread. To achieve total toast one had to flip the finger-burning toast over before closing the door. Then, you faced the challenge all over again of obtaining a properly toasted slice. Since loaves of bread came in different sliced widths, you had to know what brand and slice-width you were using in order to succeed.

My new toaster, which I bought after five minutes of extensive study of the choices at Walmart, is a little $20 mechanical wonder. It can cook two slices of bread of any width simultaneously to any degree of darkness desired on both sides in a time determined by the machine's inner wizardry.

Later, I learned that it even has a button for bagels. Not that I plan on toasting bagels, unless they are pre-sliced. I read that slicing bagels is one of the three leading causes of bodily injury in the home to men, along with falling off a ladder and cheating on your wife.

I learned early in life of my limitations with anything mechanical. The Eureka moment occurred in Junior High, where shop was a required course for boys. Girls took home economics, which was about cooking, as I recall.

In one of the paradoxes of school life there were two teachers of shop, Mr. Doberman and Mr. Masterson. Two more different personalities could not have been created. Doberman had no interest in teaching, in kids and especially in shop. He would unlock the door to the room which housed the wood supply. It would remain open. Wood was unlimited under this scheme.

Doberman would sit at his desk throughout the hour reading two tabloids, the New York News and the New York Daily Mirror. He didn't read them as far as we could tell. He studied them, only interrupted by an occasional bite on the outsized grinder that he brought to class. It was quite aromatic from the various cheeses and salamis it contained, not to mention the oils and onions that coated the insides.

Doberman would not be distracted by a student's query. He would not look up or make eye contact. Instead, he used hand signals signifying either agreement or not to the student's request.

Meanwhile, the students proceeded to enjoy the plentiful wood. In my case, that involved drilling random holes or slicing the wood indiscriminately with one of the saws that were handy. The room was amply stocked with machinery. There was no attempt at safety. Nor were there any injuries except for a few bruised egos such as mine. Self esteem had not been invented.

Since the two tabloids did not require much time for a full read, we believed that Doberman was studying the racing data for the local horse tracks, Belmont and Aqueduct. He often mentioned attending such venues on his days off.

Doberman was also known by his sloppy appearance. He owned only one orange/tan colored jacket that he wore over a pair of wrinkled brown slacks. His shirt was always unbuttoned at the top with a tie that was loose and bore the travails of numerous battles with dripping hoagies. He was short and fat. Masterson? Well, that's another story. (To be continued)