

The Style Invitational

Week 550: Spring Cleaning



BY BOB STAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

A dress made of old AOL disks is perfect for an evening of Internet dating.

Plastic milk jugs

Those little rectangular bread bag closures

Washington Post plastic delivery bags

AOL sign-up CDs that come in the mail

Coffee cans

Packing peanuts

Worn-out disposable razors

If you're like Kevin Mellema of Falls Church (or, okay, like The Empress), you tend not to throw away something that you've already used, or will never use, if it hasn't disintegrated yet. Kevin suggests that you suggest creative uses for these items or other disposable household things, singly or in combination. For this he wins a big ball of twist ties from The Empress's kitchen drawer, plus some string with only a couple of little knots in it. First-prize winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational Trophy. First runner-up wins an empty wine bottle that is covered in leather in the form of a duck, plus a shoe brush whose handle is a duck head.

Other runners-up win the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries via fax to 202-334-4312 or by e-mail to losers@washpost.com. Snail-mail entries are not accepted. Deadline is Monday, March 29. Put the week number in the subject line of your e-mail, or you risk being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry.

Contests are judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published April 18. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's contest is by Brendan Beary of Great Mills.

Report from Week 546, in which we asked you to combine two or more U.S. towns in a "joint venture": Yes, these are places named on actual maps, which, as you'll see, some people must have curled up with for eight days running.

◆ Third runner-up: **The Rocky (Okla.)-Mountain (N.D.)-Oyster (Va.) Masquerade Ball** (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

◆ Second runner-up: **The Kissimmee (Fla.)-Ona (Ore.)-Butts (Mo.) Career Development Center** (Jeff Nadler, New York)

◆ First runner-up, the winner of the Gotta Go fake call-waiting sound machine: **The Watton-Hellam-Ida-Ware (Mich., Pa., Okla., Mass.) "Dress for Success" Seminar** (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

◆ And the winner of the Inker: **The Pierce-Naples-Garner-Hurt-Lake-Kell-Venice-Yankton (Fla., Fla., N.C., Va., Miss., Ill., Calif., S.D.) Festival of Body Decoration** (Dudley Thompson, Raleigh)

Honorable Mentions:

The Enid-Laredo-Yoder-Aldine (Okla., Tex., Wyo., Tex.) National Palindrome Competition (Chris Doyle)

The Marietta (Ga.)-Liddell (N.C.)-Lamm (N.C.) Children's Library (Brendan Beary)

The Mystic (Conn.)-Chickasaw (Ala.)-Helper (Utah) Magicians' Assistants' Conference (Seth Brown, North Adams, Mass.)

Islip (N.Y.), Crane Neck (N.Y.) & Sioux City (Iowa) Personal Injury Associates (Jeff Brechlin, Potomac Falls)

The Pray-Novice-Pilot-Cando-Landing (Mont., Tex., Va., N.D., N.J.) Air Phobia Support Group (Russell Beland, Springfield)

The Minnehaha (Wash.)-Van (W.Va.) Clown Car Factory (Bruce W. Alter, Fairfax Station)

The Tightwad-Bosses-Skidoo-Withe-Golden-Parachute (Mo., Va., Calif., Wash., Miss., Colo.) Commission on Executive Pay (Chris Doyle)

The Hartelle (Ala.)-Gypsum (Colo.) Convention of Used-Car Salesmen (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

The Gurley-Callender-Onda-Wall (Neb., Calif., Ark., Tex.) Auto Shop (Brendan Beary)

The Flippin (Ark.)-Boyd (Wis.) Retreat for Brooklyn's Road Ragers (Dave Kornornik, Danville, Va.)

The Keokuk (Iowa)-Chappaqua (N.Y.) Conference on Jazz Drumming Sounds (Phil Frankenfeld, Washington)

The Maxwell (Calif.)-Silver (Tex.)-Hammer (S.D.) Center for Pataphysical Science (Carole Lyons, Arlington)

The Feather Falls (Calif.)-Rock Falls (Ill.) Galileo Museum (Jerome Alfred, Annandale)

The Smart-Ware-Coats-Wilder-Dumfries (Va., Utah, N.C., Minn., Va.) School of Dressing for the Elements (Brendan Beary)

The Boiling Springs-Hot Springs-Warm Springs-Cold Spring-Soso-Loving (S.C., Ark., Ga., N.Y., Miss., N.M.) Seminar on "Keeping the Spark in Your Marriage" (Peter Metrinko, Plymouth, Minn.)

The Winters-Springs-Summers-Falls (Calif., Pa., Ark., W.Va.) Vivaldi Festival (Steve Shapiro, Alexandria; Erika Reinfield, Somerville, Mass.)

The Lay-Dees-Canby-All-Man (Colo., Ill., Calif., Mo., W.Va.) Gender Modification Center (Scott Campisi, Wake Village, Tex.)

The Bush (Ky.)-Florida (Mo.)-Bush (La.)-Florida (Ind.)-Bush (Miss.)-Florida (N.M.)-Bush (Ill.)-Florida (N.Y.) Committee to Reelect the President (Jan Smith, Columbia)

The Kenosha (Wis.)-Limiter (N.M.)-Mechanic Falls (Maine) Center to Reduce Workplace Injuries (Brendan Beary)

The Yoe (Pa.)-Adrian (Mo.) Fight Night (Jeffrey Scharf, Burke)

The Rome-Orme-Orem-Omer (N.Y., Tenn., Utah, Mich.) Scrabble Championship (Chris Doyle)

The Bland-Normal-Plainville-Blandford (Mo., Ill., Conn., Mass.) Super Duper Wacky Fun Festival (Seth Brown)

The Accident-Talley-Box Elder-Leeman (Md., Ark., S.D., Wis.) Investigation Into Premature Burial (Elden Carnahan, Laurel)

The Nippenose (Pa.)-Jackson Hole (Wyo.) Alliance Against Excessive Rhinoplasty (Bob Dalton, Arlington)

The Whypo (N.M.)-Nott (Ky.)-Rich (Ky.) Conference on Income Inequities (Elden Carnahan)

The Quigley-Robbins-Tudor-Bat Cave (La., N.C., Calif., N.C.) Emergency Response Team (Dudley Thompson)

The Martha-Stewart-Orange-Jump-Suit (Ky., Ind., N.J., Ohio, N.C.) Fashion Committee (J.F. Martin, Naples, Fla.)

The Bird in Hand-Worth-Bush-Bush (Pa., W.Va., Ky., La.) Trading Post (Russell Beland)

The Hurd (N.D.)-Trudy (Ga.)-Grapevine (Ky.) Center for Rumor Control (Brendan Beary)

The Helena (Mont.)-Hand (S.C.)-Basket (Pa.) Institute for the Study of the Diminishing Quality of Life (Brendan Beary)

The Topeka (Kan.)-Mendon (Ohio) Sock Darning Center (Russell Beland)

The Eighty-Four (Pa.)-Fifty-Six (Ark.)-Ninety Six (S.C.) Center for Obesity Studies (Brendan Beary)

The White City (Fla.)-Gunn City (Mo.) Republican Convention (Seth Brown)

The Jerry (N.C.)-Springerville (Ariz.) Planned Community for Transgendered Crack Addicts Who Have Sex With Extraterrestrials (Brendan Beary)

The Shorewood-Tell-Wausa-Mattapony (Wis., Tex., Neb., Mass.) Conference of Horse Whisperers (Carole Lyons)

The Bingen (Wash.)-Puuiiki (Hawaii) Anti-Bulimia Sisterhood (Bob Dalton)

The French Lick (Ind.)-Axis (Ala.) Military Fantasy Camp (Steve Fahey, Kensington)

The Paw Paw (Mich.)-Hazard (Ky.)-Blackfoot (Idaho) Barefoot Dog-Walkers Convention (Seth Brown)

The Thor (Ind.)-Luther (Mich.) Hold Your Tongue Center for Anger Management and Speech Therapy (Chris Doyle)

And Last: The Complete-Entry-Not-Worth-Effort (Miss., W.Va., Mo., Ga., Pa.) Something Something (Mark Hagenau, Derry, N.H.)

And Really Last: The Athol (Mass.)-Folks (Ga.) Bugs Bunny Fan Club (Jane Auerbach, Los Angeles)

MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

Any Excuse for a Party

"Honor fatigue" is what this Gentle Reader calls it:

"It's like I was a kid again, when I spent all my time going to birthday parties. That was okay, because I was too young for poker night. But now my poker night keeps getting canceled because I have to go to birthday parties. For guys older than I am. Some of them drooling on their birthday cakes.

"Okay, that was mean. I take it back. I'm not responsible, I'm suffering from honor fatigue.

"This week alone, I've got two birthday parties, a promotion party and an anniversary. The anniversary party is for some good friends, but it's not like I didn't see enough of their entire crowd of other friends and relatives at their engagement and wedding parties, which took up most of last year. The promotion is for a lady at work getting kind of an up-and-out position, only there is no budget for a party, so the staff was pressured to do something. I get along fine with these people, but again—I don't see enough of them?"

"One of the birthdays is for a college friend I would honestly like to see more of, but not at a surprise party his wife is giving—for the third year in a row, so the surprise will be whether he can manage to look surprised. The other is for one of my old teachers being honored by some guy who gives him one of those celebrating-your-career parties every couple of years.

"Two of these are pay-your-own-way, and three have a collection to get a big present. That's typical of these events, plus other parties I didn't even mention, where someone is getting an award or giving a housewarming or moving out of town.

"Why do they do it? The worst night of my life was the surprise party my parents threw when I got out of the military. Everyone—my high school class, my parents' friends, the neighbors—had to act like I was some kind of war hero, when I'd never even left the States. And my girlfriend is pestering me that she wants to give me a birthday party, when I didn't even know her for my last birthday and I'm not sure she'll be around for the next.

"What is going on?"

There, there. Too much sugary birthday cake will do that to you. Miss Manners begs you to calm down. You don't really want people to stop having celebrations.

The problem is that they don't want to celebrate only with those who are genuinely close to the person being honored. Hosts harbor bigger ideas. They want something more like a popular uprising, and perhaps a bit of help with the presents. So they fill out the numbers with those whose emotions are much less involved.

Many invitees are pleased to go simply to attend a party. Others, such as yourself, feel that being

asked to honor someone, rather than just to have a good time, makes it a duty. Miss Manners suggests a modest test: Is this someone to whom your own birthday would be meaningful? If not, a note of regret and congratulations will do.

Dear Miss Manners:

Would you be so kind as to clarify who should initiate a "re-call" when a cell phone call is unexpectedly terminated due to signal loss? Would the person who has received or the one who placed the call be responsible for reestablishing the connection?

The person who thinks it is the fault of his telephone system. And when we are thus able to identify the person whose system never malfunctions, Miss Manners would appreciate being told which one it is.

Dear Miss Manners:

My husband and I have had a long-standing disagreement that we just can't get past. I'm willing to accept your answer, although my husband will probably accept your answer only if you agree with him. He claims that pepper should go in the shaker with the most holes because it is coarser than salt (assume the holes are the same size on each shaker).

The shakers that started this never-ending argument are shaped like Pilgrims. The male has three holes and the female has two. So, I believe that doubly proves it: salt should always be in the male shaker. I recently purchased a new set (ahal) that clearly have "Salt" and "Pepper" painted on each one—salt has five holes and the pepper has three. He says the company that made them is wrong. To add to my woes, his side of the family agrees with him, and my side agrees with me. So, I don't get it, or do I?

You don't seem to get the fact that this argument is not about salt and pepper, but about taking sides, regardless of facts. But, then, Miss Manners doesn't get the part about salt's being obviously intended for the male shaker, and would prefer that you not explain it to her.

As people generally take more salt than pepper, shakers are designed to release more. Miss Manners hopes this will be of some comfort to you when your husband and his family refuses to believe it.

Feeling incorrect? E-mail your etiquette questions to Miss Manners (who is distraught that she cannot reply personally) at MissManners@unitedmedia.com or mail to United Media, 200 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016.

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DEAR ABBY

Dear Abby:

Our otherwise responsible 15-year-old daughter, "Marie," is upset with her father and me because we won't allow her to have her belly button pierced. She's a good kid, and we originally told her she could get it pierced if she improved her grades. However, after thinking it over, we changed our minds.

Marie couldn't believe we'd changed our minds. She worked hard and brought her grades up to A's and B's. Now she is in tears because we won't let her have the piercing.

At what age do you and your readers consider belly button piercing appropriate?

Upset in Collegeville, Pa.

I see navel piercing as a fad that has gone mainstream. Discuss it with your family physician or a dermatologist to determine what the risks are. Be sure your daughter is present so she is aware of them, too. (As long as the procedure is done hygienically, it shouldn't cause any damage.) And in the future, I advise you to think carefully before making any more promises to your daughter.

Dear Abby:

I am getting married in August. My best friend, "Judy," is my maid of honor. My problem is she expects me to invite her fiancé, "Joe," to the wedding.

While I love Judy dearly, I do not care for her fiancé. When they are together, they keep to themselves and barely interact with other people.

I'm afraid if I invite Joe to my wedding she'll spend most of her time with him. He has never done anything to make me dislike him, but I've never had a good feeling about him since the day I met him. I want to keep my friend happy, but I also want to have the wedding of my dreams. I'm worried if I invite Joe it will put a damper on my day, and if I don't invite him, Judy will be hurt. Is it okay not to invite him?

Bride-to-Be

No, it's not okay. To exclude your friend's fiancé would be selfish and a breach of etiquette. They are officially a couple, and besides, on your wedding day you will be so busy with your guests and your new husband that you won't have time to dwell on the amount of attention you'll be receiving from your maid of honor.

Dear Abby:

My husband's friend, "Kevin," has been coming to our house once a week for the past eight years. He is always broke and looking for a handout, even though he has a full-time job.

In the beginning, I tried to help him by inviting him to stay for dinner once in a while. Now he has started to complain: The steak isn't cooked the way he likes it, or I don't toss the salad the way his mom does. (By the way, Kevin is 35 and still lives at home.) The reason he always needs money is that he spends every paycheck on drugs.

I recently gave birth to my first child and I don't want him to be around someone like Kevin, but my husband refuses to stop his friend from coming to our house. How can I—politely—get this moocher out of my home without causing trouble between my husband and myself?

New Mom

That's easy. Stop feeding that moocher steak, go vegetarian, and toss the salads YOUR way. I predict he'll be out of your hair as soon as the gravy train stops rolling.

P.S. You don't mention what kind of drugs this man is addicted to, but he should not be around your baby while he is under the influence. If your husband continues to object, explain to him that it could be considered child endangerment.

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, Calif. 90069.

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BRIDGE | Frank Stewart

N-S vulnerable

NORTH (D)
 ♠ J 3
 ♥ K J 4 2
 ♦ 7 5 2
 ♣ A K 4 2

WEST
 ♠ K 9 8 6
 ♥ 6 5 3
 ♦ 6 4
 ♣ 10 9 8 6

EAST
 ♠ 10 7 5 2
 ♥ 8
 ♦ A K J 9 8
 ♣ J 7 5

SOUTH
 ♠ A Q 4
 ♥ A Q 10 9 7
 ♦ Q 10 3
 ♣ Q 3

The bidding:

North	East	South	West
Pass	Pass	1 NT	Pass
2 ♣	2 ♦	2 ♥	Pass
4 ♥	All Pass		

Opening lead—♦ 6

I was playing in a tournament some years ago and was declarer at 6NT. The opening lead was the ten of clubs, dummy had K-Q-8 and I had 5-4-3. I played the king and it won.

It never occurred to me that the opening leader had under-led the ace of clubs against a slam. I assumed his partner had ducked with the ace (which could have been correct technique). I decided on a complex line of play—a "squeeze without the count"—and went down when I'd have made the slam by leading a second club toward the queen!

Expert is as expert does, and no expert worthy of the name wants to make a contract with a finesse when some super-duper-triple-whammy squeeze is available.

In today's deal, East takes the K-A of diamonds and leads a third

diamond, and West ruffs your queen and leads a trump. After you draw trumps, you note that a winning spade finesse will see you home. How do you play?

It doesn't take an expert to figure the spade finesse will fail: East didn't open the bidding but has shown A-K-J-9-8 of diamonds and may have the jack of clubs.

You can justify a more spectacular line of play. Lead the jack of spades from dummy, but when East plays low, take the ace and run your trumps. After nine tricks, you'll have Q-4 of spades and Q-3 of clubs, and dummy will have the A-K-4-2 of clubs.

West, still to discard, is stuck. If he throws a club, you win four club tricks. If he throws the king of spades, your queen scores for the 10th trick.

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Next Week: Give Us a Bad Name, or Brand Muffings