

The Style Invitational



BY BOB STAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Set up a National Fruitcake Eaters Registry to make it easier to re-gift the brick you get for Christmas.

Week 639: What's The Small Idea?

The public-spirited folks at the Service Employees International Union are sponsoring a contest with a grand prize of \$100,000: "We're looking for fresh, new ideas for a better America. Do you have a common-sense idea that will improve the day-to-day lives of everyday Americans?"

The puerile-spirited folks at The Style Invitational are sponsoring a contest with a grand prize of half a set of bookends with a bag over its head: **We're looking for funny stuff to put on Page D2 of The Washington Post. Do you have a senseless idea for improving the day-to-day lives of everyday Americans?**

Winner receives the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. First runner-up receives, via Loser Dave Prevar of Annapolis, a bottle of Genuine Gold from Colorado. That would be gold flakes suspended in liquid, with a little prospector charm atop the bottle cap. They are, well, shiny.

Other runners-up win a 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 by e-mail to losers@washpost.com or, if you really have to, by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Dec. 12. Put "Week 639" in the subject line of your e-mail, or it risks being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. Contests are judged on humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published Jan. 1. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. This week's contest was suggested by several people; the example is by Russell Beland of Springfield. The revised title for next week's contest is by John O'Byrne of Dublin.

REPORT FROM WEEK 635

In which the *Empress* masochistically invited people to send in entries for any of her previous 99 contests (they could refer to later events). Not surprisingly, it was the perennial Losers who went to town on this one.

4 Week 612, No. 102 on a list of 101 things: **101 Ways to Stop Global Warming No. 102: Blow on the ground.** (Martin Bancroft, Ann Arbor, Mich.)

3 Week 625, new plots for real movie titles: **"Jumpin' Jack Flash": Hidden-camera footage of too-revealing calisthenics at the fitness club.** (Brendan Beary, Great Mills)

2 The winner of the Monopoly rip-off game **Washington in a Box: Week 608, retorts: Q. Are you fishing? A. No, I'm walking my pet lake.** (Eric Murphy, Ann Arbor, Mich.)

A CHRONICLE OF HONORABLE MENTIONS

Week 539, poems about notables who died in 2003: **I mourn the death of Spectacular Bid / Each time I open a dog food lid.** (Brendan Beary)

Week 540, historical events as pairs of puns: **411 B.C.: Aristophanes writes "Lysistrata": Sex and the City-State, or No Hits, No Runs, No Eros.** (Chris Doyle)

Week 545, spell a word backward and define the result: **Oedor: The mixed scent of broncos, bulls, cowboys and fear.** (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village)

Le Guk: An unsuccessful brand of noodle pudding. (Roy Ashley, Washington)

Week 546, combine two or more U.S. towns in a "joint venture": **The Phenix (Va.) - Pittsburg (N.H.) J. Danforth Quayle Center for Academic Excellence** (Russell Beland, Springfield)

The Youngblood (Ala.) Coeur d'Alene (Idaho) Screamer (Tenn.) Horror Movie Hall of Fame (Brendan Beary)

Week 547, the good and bad of corporate names: **Big Red Gum is a good name for chewing gum but a bad name for a periodontal clinic.** (Russell Beland)

No Nonsense Sheer Endurance is a good name for pantyhose but a bad name for an escort service. (Brendan Beary)

Week 548, what celebrities did as children: **Johnny Cameron Swayze smashed his father's watch with a hammer and, boy, did he get a licking.** (Roy Ashley)

Week 568, groaner puns on book titles: **What do Yellowstone rangers call a first-time hiker? Bear Food in the Park.** (Chris Doyle)

What did they call the booby prize at the casserole cook-off? The Winner of Our Dish Contempt. (Chris Doyle)

Week 571, invent a word containing, adjacently, T, H, E and S: **Chesticles: Mammaries.** (Ben Schwab, Severna Park)

Week 577, plays on TV show titles: **Fear Factorial: Not just fear, but fear!** (Tom Greening, North Bethesda)

Husseinfeld: A sitcom about a dictator who hangs out with three annoying, neurotic people for nine years, then has them shot. (Ben Schwab)

Week 579, alter the title of a TV show: **The Young and the Wristless: Life in a Saudi reform school.** (Michelle Stupak, Ellicott City)

Weeks 589 and 628, combine the beginning and end of two words in that week's Invitational: **Strad-buster: His new nickname summed up why Pete Townshend's second career as a concert violinist met a quick end.** (Pam Sweeney, Germantown)

Ma-spective, pa-spective, gram-spective: "No, because I said so": "Okay, but don't get arrested"; "Here, honey, eat something." (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

Week 595, define a hyphenated heading on a page of a phone book: **Child-Chimney: Vulgarism for the birth canal.** (Deborah Guy, Columbus, Ohio)

Fireplace-Fishing: This week on "America's Stupidest Hobbies." (Ben Schwab)

Week 598, names for rooms at particular places: **Restroom at a tech support center: Nature Calls (average wait time: 72 minutes)** (Pam Sweeney)

Week 602, change a word beginning with A, B, C or D by one letter and redefine it: **Argoyles: really ugly socks.** (Michelle Stupak)

Debaucherry: one's first orgy. (Tom Witte)

Commandot: a telltale sign that someone isn't wearing underwear. (Tom Witte)

Week 612, No. 102 of a list of 101 items: **101 Rules for Dressing for Success No. 102: Be sure your lipstick matches the shade of your snake tattoo.** (Howard Walderman, Columbia)

101 Tools for Husbands to Help Their Wives No. 102: the orchid whacker. (Roy Ashley)

1 AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER:

Week 629, "marriages": **If Anouk Aimee married Norman Lear, Rick Dees and John Jacob Astor, we'd surely have Anouk Lear Dees Astor.** (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)



Week 615, announcements for the Independence Air comic to make: **Good news! Bank of America has just approved a short-term loan, so we'll be flying with a full tank of fuel on this leg of the trip. We'll keep you informed if that changes.** (Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

Week 617, write about someone using only the letters in his name: **Anderson Cooper: N.O. is a pond! CNN's pop porno scoops peers, addresses errors, recaps needs. Dons a cape and ascends onscreen. . . . Poor Aaron.** (Michele Puzananchera, Pittsburgh)

Week 620, Ways to increase Post readership: **Invent a rumor that the city's competing paper is owned by a right-wing religious cult.** (Russell Beland)

Week 622, a new amendment to the Constitution containing only words from the original: **The President shall appoint a citizen to limit immediate danger caused by nature to any State. This person shall be chosen for his payment to the President or Vice President, or by contributing to the list of all persons who voted for the President, and shall not have any other qualification.** (Drew Bennett, Alexandria)

Week 625, new plots for real movie titles: **"9 to 5": A woman adjusts to life with her, um, less substantial second husband.** (Tom Witte)

Week 629, comical marriages or other unions: **If Dee Wallace-Stone married Eric Carmen, Rob Lowe, Cornel West, John Dean, Mark Harmon and Ralph Nader, she'd be Dee Lowe West Carmen Dean Harmon Nader.** (Chris Doyle)

If Dick Van Dyke married Lorena Bobbitt, you'd have Van Dyke. (Seth Brown, North Adams, Mass.)

Week 632, backronyms: **Speed Stick: Seriously, People, Employ [Expletive] Deodorant! Stench That Indecent Could Kill!** (Jonathan Guberman, Princeton, N.J.)

Viagra: Verifiably Increases A Gent's Recreational Amplitude (Phil Frankenfeld, Washington)

NASA: Not All Shuttles Arrive (Melissa Yorks, Gaithersburg)

Next Week: A Song From Tex Arcana, or Compose Mentis

One Nation, Under A Cloud of Fear

SCARED, From D1

and bad news eventually becomes an indistinguishable, indecipherable din, says Marc Siegel, a New York doctor and author of "False Alarm: The Truth About the Epidemic of Fear." He believes we need to redirect the nation's, and our own, response to danger warnings. "I'm not against preparation," he says, "I'm against alarmism."

The core problem lies in the amygdala — the little bobsled-shaped part of the brain that processes fear. The amygdala is at the center of the brain's emotional network. Primal feelings — and stress — come from here. But the crucial area can only handle one emotion at a time. "The same amygdala that processes fear," Siegel explains, "also processes positive emotions. So if you are busy fueling your amygdala with fear, then courage, passion, laughter can't get in."

In other words, if the brain is always on a yellow (elevated alert) threat level, it is not able to rest or relax or even prepare properly for the next real onslaught.

So it is with our national amygdala — Washington.

Here in the fear center of America's brain, the government, the corporate lobbyists and the media converge. (Prime example: In February, MarketWatch reported that Tom Ridge, the former head of Homeland Security who urged us all to buy lots of duct tape, was joining the board of directors of Home Depot, megasellers of duct tape.)

Washington has the same challenge our brains do — separating real threats from perceived threats. The triage, Siegel says, is not going so well. "If you are constantly putting the worst-case scenario out there," Siegel says, "you are communicating to people that that's the most likely thing to happen."

That, he says, "is the reason you have a scared nation. Everybody believes that the worst thing is going to happen tomorrow. That's not true."

We should prepare for all scenarios — the worst and the best — he says. Instead "we are constantly personalizing risk in ways that are not realistic."

Tom Finnigan of Citizens Against Government Waste (CAGW), puts it this way: "Humans have a tendency to overestimate small risks while underestimating big risks, and politicians and special interests are very

good at taking advantage of it."

The world is a dangerous place — and it became even more so in the wake of 9/11 — but it couldn't possibly be as treacherous, as dastardly, as booby-trapped as the government and the corporations and the media would have us believe.

And if the fear has flowed into the corners of Ridgely, it is doubtless in every corner of our country. Consider these events, as documented by CAGW and other groups:

- Concerned that terrorists might infiltrate the state's bingo parlors, Kentucky received a \$36,300 Homeland Security grant in October to thwart such a possibility.

- Fearful of explosives, Grand Forks, N.D., this year used \$145,000 from Homeland Security to buy a bomb-dismantling robot. In September, the Grand Forks Herald reported that the robot, five police officers, a sheriff's deputy and an X-ray machine were deployed to check out a suspicious nylon backpack left by vagrants under a pine tree. It contained bricks.

- Skittish Boston Harbor officials have a dinner cruise yacht doing double duty as an anti-terrorist vessel.

"There are plenty of cases where the public's fear over exaggerated threats leads to government spending on projects and programs that are wasteful or of dubious merit," Finnigan writes in an e-mail.

Widespread fear may be good for business, but it's bad for the national psyche. And we are getting zapped from every direction. If the president is not reminding us that his administration is fighting terrorism abroad and "doing everything we can to disrupt folks that might be here in America trying to hurt you," then he is warning us that avian flu "may be the first pandemic of the 21st century." Actually, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention awarded that trophy to SARS. Remember when we were scared of SARS?

Members of Congress are familiar with fear. Jo Ann Emerson, a Republican congresswoman from Missouri, told an appropriations subcommittee that one "huge problem that worries me" is "a possible earthquake where I live in the New Madrid Fault in Missouri and the fact that I suspect there isn't a plan in place to deal with the aftermath of that."

John Carter, a Republican from Texas, opined about the danger



BY BOBBY YIP — REUTERS

posed by illegal immigrants from Mexico. "It's frightening," he told his colleagues.

Homeland Security is in the business of preparedness in this fright-fraught culture. On its Ready America Web site (www.ready.gov), the department stresses preparedness by reminding us: "Don't Be Afraid, Be Ready." Brian Doyle, deputy press secretary of Homeland Security, says that since it was formed in 2002, his agency has done "a million different things" to make the United States safer. On Sept. 11, 2001, there were some 33 air marshals in the skies, mostly flying international routes. Today, according to DHS, there are thousands on flights everywhere. Hundreds of airline pilots have been trained to use guns. Cockpit doors have been secured on

6,000 aircraft. Every single piece of checked baggage is screened.

A robust "student and exchange information system," Doyle says, "has been tracking where every foreign student is."

Corporations have jumped on the fraidy-cat bandwagon. In promotional material, Lockheed Martin warns us that a new generation of fighter jets is being developed by our enemies, putting "the United States' ability to gain and maintain air superiority, much less air dominance, at increasing risk." Showtime is producing a your-neighbor-may-be-a-terrorist series called "Sleeper Cell."

And the media buy into the hype and hyperbole. Night after night you see the hysteria on TV news and talk shows. We have become a nation that cries: Wolf Blitzler!



BY EVAN SEMON — ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

Clockwise from left: In 2004, we were worried about a SARS epidemic; at Denver International and other airports, post-9/11 security measures lengthened passenger-screening times; wildfires in Velma, Okla.



BY ROGER CALGER — ASSOCIATED PRESS

The government also uses scare-dy-pants tactics with young folks. The Federal Emergency Management Agency Web site for kids, for instance, features a hermit crab mascot named Herman, who, when faced with flood or fire, scurries like a scared crab to find a new shell to hide in. Couldn't the mascot be a wise, muscular Saint Bernard that helps people in disasters?

"Or a bald eagle?" suggests Marc Siegel, "that soars above it all?"

On this recent day, only crows are seen in the overcast sky above Ridgely, the little town that fear remembered. At the town park, William Wilkins, 62, a retired surveyor, takes his daily constitutional. Like many Americans, he thinks fighting evil is a noble pursuit, but he's not sure why the government is worried

about terrorism in Ridgely. "The cameras can't hurt," he admits. "But I'm surprised they didn't put them out here."

He points to the park. "The kids come out here. Especially those ones on the skateboards. They throw trash around."

Chief Evans says he does plan to place a camera at the town park to watch the skateboarders. He will also install one near the water tower and another at the nearby waste water treatment plant, in case any terrorists might try to tamper with the supply.

"That's a secured facility," he says. "It's called 'target hardening.'" He welcomes all the cameras because they help him keep an eye on things and, he says, "because Homeland Security paid for them."