

The Style Invitational

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 786: Top of the Staake



CARTOONS BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Though he's been slumming lately with yet another New Yorker cover (no, it's not the Obama as Osama one), Almost Forever Style Invitational Cartoonist Bob Staake wants to remind us he can still produce sophisticated, thought-provoking work. So get your thoughts provoked for No. Umpteen of our cartoon caption contest.

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives a Mental Block, a circular block-thing that pulls apart into various configurations, revealing various platitudes about the value of teamwork. If you had several people pulling together, for example, they could yank this baby apart in two seconds. Donated by Loser Nonpareil Russell Beland.

Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable Mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. First Offenders get a smelly tree-shaped air freshener (Fir Stink for their First Ink). One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to losers@washpost.com or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Oct. 20. Put "Week 786" 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 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 Nov. 8. No purchase required for entry. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's results was sent by both Tom Witte and Chris Doyle; Tom also wrote this week's Honorable Mentions name.

REPORT FROM WEEK 782

In which we gave a list of people and other things and asked you to explain why any of them would be qualified to be president of the United States, or why any two of them would make a good ticket. As you'll see, a lot of the explanations are frankly an absurd stretch. Well...

Frequently noted: The rock doesn't change its position every time the wind changes, and that Sweeney Todd and Britney Spears's hairstylist would both be good at making drastic cuts.

DORK HORSES: HONORABLE MENTIONS

A moss-covered rock: Though he presents a tough exterior, time has smoothed his rough edges. And he's a firm supporter of the environment (or firmly supported by the environment). (Alli Peterson, Newark, Del., a First Offender; and thanks to all the students at the Charter School of Wilmington who've been entering the Invitational week after week)

At least we'll know which direction we're headed. (Mary Ellen Webb, Fairfax; Meredith Brown, Wilmington, Del. — a First Offender)

Moss Rock is solid in times of crisis, he's clearly the true environmental candidate, and his campaign anthem is one of the best songs ever written. — B. Seger (Brad Alexander, Wanneroo, Australia)

A dish of tapioca pudding: With the coming depression, who better to serve on America's bread lines? (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

Ex-president James Buchanan: You're not going to find any skeletons in Buchanan's closet. Aside from Buchanan, that is. (Jay Shuck, Minneapolis)

Not only does he not get involved in other countries' imminent civil wars, he doesn't get involved in our own. (Bryan Crain)

He won't be having any sordid affairs with nubile young women! (Christopher Lamora, Arlington)

Krusty the Clown: Who better to follow eight years of Bozo? (Mike Ostapiej, Tracy, Calif.)

Bert from "Sesame Street": Orientation aside, his monogamy is impressive — 39 years with the same partner. (Tristan Axelrod, Brescia, Italy)

It's time, after all these years, to have a man of letters in the White House. (Stephen Dudzik, Olney; Peter Metrinko, Chantilly)

Although he is from outside the Beltway, he somewhat resembles the Washington Monument. (Dan Colilla, Washington, Pa.)

The Orange Line train from New Carrollton: It'll repeat the same messages to the same audience every day and they'll still come back for more! (Rick Haynes, Potomac)

Vinko Bogataj, the "agony of defeat" ski jumper from "Wide World of Sports": He's arguably the world's greatest roll

4 Vinko Bogataj, the "agony of defeat" ski jumper from "Wide World of Sports": People won't mind watching him screw up the same way, over and over again. (Mary Ellen Webb, Fairfax, a First Offender)

3 Benedict Arnold: Hey, he's really only flip-flopped on one issue. (Drew Bennett, West Plains, Mo.)

2 the winner of the McCain and Obama gargoyles: If the stock market ever crashed, we could simply restore the previous session. (Bryan Crain, Modesto, Calif.)

AND THE WINNER OF THE INKER

Benedict Arnold: Now here's a candidate who has really fought for change in American government! (Rick Wood, Falls Church)

Look at his success in foreign policy: He's already had a Czar and an Empress wrapped around his finger. (Marc Boysworth, Burke)

I can see Dale City from my house. As for foreign relations, I've traveled to Mexico, specifically Cancun, and experienced a bad hangover on the plane ride back. I've often been quoted in The Washington Post. I am an expert on natural gas, as I am lactose-intolerant. I have been drug-free for many years, more if you don't count stool softeners. I am no stranger to torture, as I have attended a Celine Dion concert. Court records of my teenage years are sealed. And I once sold something on eBay. (Chuck Smith, Woodbridge)

TICKETS

Tapioca pudding / goldfish: One is old-fashioned, plain, lumpy, pasty and white, the other new and unknown, with limited experience swimming in a small pond, suddenly thrust out in the world in a goldfish bowl, unable to hide. Just right for the GOP. (John Bunyan, Cincinnati)

Moss-covered rock / Benedict Arnold: Both the rock — it's no rolling stone — and Benedict Arnold take a firm anti-revolution stance. (Pam Sweeney, St. Paul, Minn.)

Goldfish / Bert: As Sarah Palin reminds us, "We must not blink." Here are two candidates who never will! (Barbara Turner, Takoma Park; Steve Offutt, Arlington; Dan Ramish, Vienna)

Benedict Arnold / James Buchanan: Our counterintelligence efforts will vastly improve under two people who know what it's like to play for the other team. (N.G. Andrews, Portsmouth, Va.)

Goldfish / Chuck Smith: The 49-cent goldfish, you have to wonder if there's a lot of life left in it, and Smith constantly gets his name in the paper for saying silly things. Not the most endearing "qualities" per se, but that doesn't seem to matter. (Christopher Lamora; Brian Cohen, Potomac)

Next Week: The Shill Game, or Celebrities

Arbitron Picking Up a Lot of Static Over Its Portable People Meter

BLACK BOX, From C1

young — are systematically under-represented in Arbitron's people-meter surveys, leading to underestimates of the audience for their stations. The result, they say, will be a massive loss of advertising dollars for stations that have large minority audiences.

"It's not accurate and it's not reliable," says Jeffery Lieberman, president of the radio division of Entravision Communications, a California-based company that owns 48 Spanish-language stations nationwide. "It's a flawed system."

This week, just as Arbitron has begun to use the meters in the Washington area, the issue has mushroomed. It has even turned into a minor issue on the campaign trail.

Yesterday brought a crossfire of lawsuits. Attorneys general in New York and New Jersey filed suits to stop Arbitron from making its people-meter data available to stations and advertisers in the New York area, which is the nation's largest radio market. Later yesterday, Arbitron responded by filing countersuits against the attorneys general to prevent them from blocking the data; the company denied the attorneys general's allegations that its electronic system is "fraudulent."

On another front, Entravision and a coalition of minority broadcasters late last month petitioned the Federal Commu-

nications Commission to stop Arbitron from using the meters until the government studies the system's reliability.

Meanwhile, Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama has weighed in on behalf of the minority stations. "Delay is in the best interest of consumers, broadcasters and advertisers," he wrote last month in a letter to Arbitron President Steve Morris. The letter, which was co-signed by Sen. Richard J. Durbin, a fellow Democrat from Illinois, urged the company to seek accreditation from an independent research panel before introducing the meters to new markets, including Washington.

Arbitron has repeatedly defended its sampling methods and meters against all of these criticisms. It says the new system produces far more accurate results than its decades-old diary method, which relied on respondents to remember what they listened to during the week. "The quality of the product is solid," Morris recently told a conference of African American radio executives in Washington.

There's no dispute about one aspect of the new ratings. Early results from Houston and Philadelphia — which last year became the first cities to get the meters — have challenged some basic assumptions about radio-listening habits. Among other things, the electronic data indicate that people listen to more stations — and spend less time

listening to them — than the diaries have shown for decades.

But other findings have generated controversy. Under the new method, for example, ratings for rock stations have generally grown, while those for minority-oriented stations have fluctuated wildly. In Chicago, ratings released Monday showed that WGCI-FM, an urban-contemporary station, fell to No. 14 among local stations; WGCI had been No. 2 during the last survey period, when diaries were used. Another music station with a large African American audience, WBBM-FM, tumbled from seventh to 20th.

The people-meter issue has particular relevance in the Washington area because of the popularity of minority-oriented stations. For many years, local ratings have been dominated by four black-oriented music stations — WPGC-FM, WHUR-FM, WKYS-FM and WMMJ-FM. In the past two years, a new Spanish-language pop station, WLZL-FM — has cracked the top 10, as well (the first metered ratings for Washington stations will appear at the end of December).

The chief problem, critics say, is that Arbitron recruits an insufficient number of survey participants in person, as well as an inadequate number of those who use only cellphones at home. That allegedly biases the survey results against stations that ap-



BY MARK LENNHAN — ASSOCIATED PRESS

Under dispute: the portable people meter, which is used to detect radio listenership.

peal to younger and poorer households. The data are also unreliable, critics contend, because the company doesn't adequately inform panelists about how to use the meters.

Some station executives defend the sys-

tem, however, maintaining that Arbitron is working the bugs out. "Anytime you adopt a new technology, there are always short-term dislocations," said Alfred C. Liggins III, chief executive of Radio One Inc., the Lanham-based company that owns 53 stations — including WMMJ and WKYS — that seek African American listeners. "There's going to be a learning curve. ... But [electronic measurement] is reality. I'd much rather get reality on the road than delay, delay, delay."

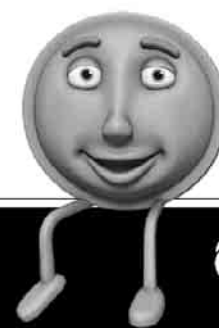
Liggins said that Radio One's stations in Houston and Philadelphia initially saw a steep drop in their ratings when the meters were introduced months ago but that they have since recovered to roughly the same ranking in the market.

Because the meters tell broadcasters who's listening to what within just a few days (compared with weeks under the diary method), stations can quickly "fine-tune" their promotions, commercial breaks and even on-air personalities, he said. In Philadelphia, for instance, Radio One removed a DJ from the air after just a few weeks when his ratings sagged; a similar personnel decision might have taken 18 months with diaries.

"If you're really brilliant and funny, you can keep talking," Liggins said. But as it turns out, "the number of people who really have that ability are few and far between."

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