News of the Weird

Chuck Shepherd | Posted: Thursday, August 28, 2014 10:23 am

NOTE: Last week's column cited a London Daily Mirror compilation of foods from around the world. It appears not only that "Squeezed Bacon" was merely an April Fool's joke from 2009 but that, sadly, in the ensuing five years, food science has not yet been able to make a real squeezed bacon.)

It's Facebook's World Now

(1) Up-and-coming Sicilian mobster Domenico Palazzotto, 28, was outed in August by Italy's L'Espresso magazine as the owner of an ineffectively pseudonymous Facebook page showing off his muscled, bare-chested body and perhaps recruiting members. One fan asked, "Do I need to send a (resume)?" "Yes, brother," came the reply. "We need to consider your criminal record. We do not take people with clean records." Palazzotto operates out of Palermo and listed among his "likes" the singer Kenny Loggins. (2) Similarly young, body-obsessed Egyptian jihadist/gym member Islam Yaken, according to his postings on Facebook-type social media sites, is a law school graduate fluent in English, French and Arabic, allowing him to describe the particular viciousness that he and his brothers and sisters will wreak upon infidels.

Can't Possibly Be True

-A jury's murder conviction, and the 15-to-life sentence it carried, against Daniel Floyd in Brooklyn, New York, for a 2008 killing went for naught in July when the Brooklyn Supreme Court ordered a retrial (with witnesses forced to testify all over again). The sole reason the court cited was a decision by the trial judge on the first day—to seat the potential jury pool and not Floyd's mother, who, because she was temporarily left standing that first day, argued successfully that her son's right to a "public" trial had been violated.

-I (Heart) Strangers: Two age-30ish men knocked on the door of a Sebastian, Texas, woman at 12:30 a.m. on Aug. 3, asking for water and if they could please come inside to charge their cellphone—and the woman apparently cheerfully invited them in, later offering them use of her backyard shed to grab some sleep. She did not learn until a short time later, when a law enforcement manhunt widened into her neighborhood, that they were wanted for murdering a U.S. Border Patrol agent. Officers arrested the pair inside the

A team of researchers from the University of Texas at Arlington announced recently that they had developed a prototype of a wind turbine that might deliver electricity in tiny bursts to devices like smartphones—it is about half the size of a grain of rice. (Tiny solar backpacks already exist.)

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The New Normal

(1) The ubiquitous "sexting" phenomenon continues to flourish. A Washington state agency suspended the license of anesthesiologist Arthur Zilberstein in June after finding that he had exchanged sexually explicit text messages—during surgeries. (2) One of the emerging occupational skills for Emergency Medical Technicians, according to first responders interviewed in a June Wall Street Journal feature, is merely holding up blankets at accident scenes—to block onlookers from their apparently uncontrollable urge to take gruesome photos to send to their friends.

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Anger Management Needed

(1) A 40-year-old man's throat was fatally slashed in August in Laurel, Montana, in a fight with an acquaintance over which military service—Army or Marines—is better. (News reports failed to identify the "winning" branch.) (2) A 37-year-old man survived, but with multiple bullet wounds, in New York City in August after a 1 a.m. dispute during the making of a rap music video. (The dispute was over who, exactly, would be the "star.") (3) Roger Harris, 63, and Bryan Bandes, 42, brawled in August on the 7th tee at the Springdale Golf Course near Uniontown, Pennsylvania, while arguing the rule for playing a ball in a rain puddle. Harris apparently 3-wooded Bandes in the head; Bandes landed punches causing a swollen jaw, a fat lip and a scratched eye.

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Wait—What?

In Multnomah County, Oregon, in July, a Romanian princess pleaded guilty to cockfighting. Irina Walker, 61, was born in Switzerland where her father, King Michael I, lived after abdicating the throne. She came to Oregon in 1983, where, in a second marriage in 2007, she fell in with former deputy sheriff John Walker, who had moved on to the gambling and cockfighting business, and, according to a USA Today report, she was assisting him.

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Solutions to Non-Problems

(1) Chung-Ang University in South Korea announced in April that its traditional-sport Department of Sport Science would begin accepting—as legitimate "student athletes"—video gamers. (2) Also in April, Berlin's Lutheran Georgen Parochial cemetery inaugurated a 4,300-square-foot area of its grounds as reserved exclusively for lesbians—for women who, said a spokesman, "want to be buried among other lesbians."
New World Order

—Japan is noted (as News of the Weird has reported in 1997 and 2008) for several traditional fertility festivals and theme parks at which explicit, oversized male genitalia are revered by joyous visitors, including children. In July, on the other hand, police quickly arrested the artist Megumi Igarashi after she scanned her vulva and then distributed the data online to allow others to create 3-D printed reproductions. That effort was the most conspicuous of several attempts she has made as an artist/designer to call attention, she said, to the underrepresentation of female genitals in Japanese society compared to males.

—Who Knew? Researchers from England's University of Lincoln revealed in July that red-footed tortoises are not only "inquisitive" but make decisions in their brain's "medial cortex" region, associated with "complex cognitive behavior" (because they have no "hippocampus," which is a typical decision-making area). The tortoises thus pecked-out (and learned) touch-screen decisions (for rewards of strawberries), and in fact, said researcher Anna Wilkinson, learned as quickly as rats and pigeons and faster, actually, than dogs.

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Movies Come to Life

1) In July, officials at the Djanogly City Academy in Nottingham, England, broke up an attempt by five students (aged 11 to 14) attending a daytime-locked-down school to escape by tunneling under a security fence. They had discovered the boys' metal cutlery hidden at the scene. (A World War II tunneling escape from a Nazi prison was partially successful and became the story for the 1963 movie The Great Escape starring Steve McQueen.)  (2) In a deadly ending reminiscent of scenes in several crime movies, a 22-year-old man fleeing police in Brooklyn, New York, in June crashed his car at a high speed into the back of a flatbed truck and was decapitated as the body of the car (but not the part above the dashboard) continued on under the truck.

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Least Competent Criminals

Not Ready for Prime Time: (1) A 40-year-old man (not named by the Seattle Post-Intelligencer) was arrested in that city on July 31 after a several-hour, epically inept, crime spree. Attempting to rob a restaurant, he was turned down by employees and customers, then turned down by two potential carjack victims (the first of whom added insult by pulling out her cellphone camera and shooting video), before giving up just as police arrived. (His only take was the $15 he had swiped from the restaurant's tip jar.) (2) Joshua Pawlak, 27, entered a total of four businesses in Woodbridge, New Jersey, on July 27 and similarly met resistance and/or indifference to his money demands—and came away from the four with only $2, also from a tip jar.
Readers' Choice

Ironies: (1) An airborne banner being towed by an airplane came loose in Fremont, California, in July and floated down, landing on a house, frightening the residents. The sign advertised GEICO insurance. (2) A 10-foot-tall pine tree in Los Angeles's Griffith Park, dedicated in 2004 with a plaque to the late musician George Harrison, was recently destroyed by an infestation, and another will be planted in its place, according to a city councilman. The infestation was by beetles.