

# News of the Weird

BY CHUCK SHEPHERD

## LEAD STORY

In January, U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers confiscated a live, jeweled beetle that a woman was wearing as an "accessory" on her sweater as she crossed into Brownsville, Texas, from Mexico. Blue jewels were glued onto the beetle's back, which had been painted gold, and the mobile brooch was tethered by a gold chain attached to a safety pin. Even though the woman orally "declared" the animal, the beetle was confiscated because she had not completed the bureau's PPQ Form 526, which is necessary to bring insects into the country. Reportedly, such jewelry is not that rare in Mexico. A spokesperson for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals was, of course, appalled.

## The Entrepreneurial Spirit

Economic Recovery in Denver: As of early January, at least 390 new Denver businesses had applied for sales-tax licenses as dispensaries for legal (medicinal) marijuana.

By comparison, Starbucks coffee shops number 208 in the entire state of Colorado. Among the first cannabis-centered businesses to open, in December, was the Ganja Gourmet on South Broadway, featuring lasagna, pizza, jambalaya, paella, flavored cheesecakes and other delicacies, all "spiced" appropriately for customers with doctors' prescriptions.

Professor Yevgeny Moskalev of Russia's St. Petersburg Technological University announced in November that he had perfected a somewhat-useful powdered version of Russia's favorite drink (vodka). However, after much experimentation, he had found that the only way to preserve the alcohol was by mixing the liquid vodka into a special wax and letting it harden. According to a November report in the English language version of Pravda, the resulting shaved chips could then be flavored to counteract the wax's insipidness, and might be used for cooking or medicine. "Instant vodka" mix for straight drink-

ing does not appear to be in professor Moskalev's plans.

In 2008, Sweden, one of only seven countries with embassies in North Korea, began trying to coax that country into the global economy by encouraging the manufacture of jeans, which Sweden in turn would arrange for sale in high-end stores. After a series of awkward missteps (e.g., a textile manufacturer, unfamiliar with the concept of "jeans," said no, but the director of a mining company decided to accept the project), 1,100 pairs were finally shipped and priced at the equivalent of about \$215 a pair, according to a December Reuters dispatch from Stockholm. (The "NoKo" jeans were initially given shelf space in at least one store, but now are offered only on the store's Web site.)

## Leading Economic Indicators

After the New York Post reported in December on the 175-square-foot Manhattan apartment recently pur-

chased by Christopher Prokop and his wife (for \$150,000, with \$800 monthly in maintenance fees), residents of even smaller Manhattan digs told the Post they were unimpressed. For instance, Felice Cohen, 39, rents a 90-square-foot apartment (\$700) with a loft bed, but admits that she must sit sideways on the toilet. Freelance event-planner Eddie Rabon rents a 55-square-foot palace for \$800 a month (closer to midtown than Cohen's). He can almost touch both side walls simultaneously and cannot easily turn around while showering. Commented the residents, respectively: "We love it," "I love it," and "It's fantastic."

The recent Christmas bonus season was rough at the RF Brookes pizza-ingredient fac-

tory in Wigston, England. Workers received only gift containers of pudding ("plum duffs") with a use-by date of March 2009, but accompanied by a letter from management assuring them that food technicians had certified the product as safe to eat in January 2010. (After numerous employee complaints, the company apologized and offered fresh plum duffs.)

## Least Competent Deer

A seven-point buck was found dead in Viroqua, Wis., in November, apparently after losing a head-butting contest with a cement-statue buck. Ramming contests are common during mating season, and the cement buck was about the same size as the dead one (but weighs about three times as much).

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