

News & Blues 2/3

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Curses, Foiled Again

Mitchel L. Legg, 26, was at a police station in Richmond, Ind., filling out an application to carry a gun, when officers and staff members noticed a telltale smell. "He reeked of marijuana," Chief Kris Wolski told The Palladium-Item, "so they patted him down." Besides marijuana, officers found a .22 semiautomatic handgun "in a little nylon holster under his shirt," Wolski said.

While responding to a domestic disturbance call in Carter County, Tenn., sheriff's Deputy Richard Barnett drove to the wrong address. Daniel Hubert Taylor Jr., 33, met Barnett at the door, invited him inside, placed his hands behind his back and said he was ready to go to jail. The Johnson City Press reported that when Barnett asked why, Taylor said he assumed the deputy had come to arrest him for outstanding warrants. Barnett called headquarters, verified that Taylor was wanted and took him into custody.

Backseat Driver

When sheriff's Deputy Kristin Rozycki stopped a vehicle for speeding in Erie County, N.Y., she found Michael G. Spagnola, 38, sitting in the back seat insisting that he had not been driving. Suspicious because he was the only occupant, Rozycki determined that Spagnola was the driver and had climbed into the back seat to avoid a ticket, a conclusion that Spagnola later confirmed, leading to a charge of driving while intoxicated.

Too Pious to Fail

State regulators closed a 6-year-old bank in Otsego, Minn., that attracted national media attention for advocating prayer in the workplace. Riverview Community Bank was an aggressive real estate lender and was hit hard by foreclosures, according to the Minneapolis Star Tribune. The bank opened as a "Christian financial institution," with a Bible buried in the foundation and the words "In God We Trust" engraved in the cornerstone. The office wall of bank president Duane Kropuenske features a large color print of Jesus and two businessmen closing a deal. One of the bank's founders, mortgage banker Chuck Ripka, once boasted that God had actually guaranteed success for investors, claiming God personally assured him, "Chuck, if you pastor the bank, I'll take care of the bottom line."

Nice Work If You Can Get It

Anthony Armatys, 35, accepted a job at Avaya telecommunications firm in Somerset Township, Ill., and filled out the necessary paperwork to start but changed his mind at the last minute and kept his current position. Avaya's new computer system removed Armatys from the human resource database but not the payroll system. As a result, Armatys received Avaya paychecks from September

2002 to February 2007. After auditors uncovered the error, an investigation learned Armatys also withdrew funds from an employee retirement savings account he had been contributing to. Accused of stealing \$470,995.53, Armatys pleaded guilty.

Melting Pot Follies

Citizens protested in Taos, N.M., after hotel owner Larry Whitten, 63, forbade Hispanic workers from speaking Spanish in his presence and ordered some to Anglicize their names. "I'm just doing what I've always done," Whitten told the Associated Press after fired workers, their relatives and some townspeople set up pickets across the street from the Paragon Inn. He explained he asked workers to speak only English because he perceived they were hostile to his management style and worried they might start talking about him in Spanish, which he doesn't understand.

Six Dallas police officers ticketed at least 39 motorists over the past three years for not speaking English, even though no law requires drivers to speak English. Police Chief David Kunkle apologized repeatedly while promising to investigate the officers involved. The Dallas Morning News reported Kunkle also ordered pending cases to be dismissed and fines already paid for the nonexistent offense to be refunded.

Rules Are Rules

Maryland's Hereford High School lost a Baltimore County cross-country championship after an official disqualified one of its runners whose black undershorts had white thread. Official Steve Smith explained the rule against wearing visible multicolor undergarments is new but is on the books and noted that a number of other runners changed their uniforms before the race to comply with the rule.

When Guns Are Outlawed

Police arrested Erik John Batty, 40, for attacking Officer Myles J. Lawler with a pillow. The Orlando Sentinel reported that Lawler responded to a call about a medical situation at Batty's mobile home in Edgewater, Fla., but Batty ordered him out of his room and threw the pillow at him. Lawler deflected the weapon but stated in his arrest report that because Batty had several diseases, "I felt the pillow was biohazardous material and could contain hazards."

Not Quite Right

Lynda K. Russell, the district attorney of Shelby County, Texas, plans to defend herself against accusations that she stole money from motorists by using the money she's accused of stealing to pay for her legal defense. The ACLU of Texas is suing Russell on behalf of the 150 motorists whose property was illegally seized and turned over to a county forfeiture fund. Reason Magazine said Russell used the fund for a Christmas party and tickets to a motorcycle rally, but the ACLU asked the state attorney general to prevent her using the fund for her defense.

Crime Pays

Members of one New York City drug gang received more than \$500,000 by repeatedly suing the city for civil rights violations. The Daily News reported that accused drug dealers from Brooklyn's East 21st St. Crew filed more than 20 lawsuits, all of which were settled out of court. One crew member, Shamel King, got \$117,500 for six separate claims. Anthony Lawrence, who was indicted on 11 counts of drug selling and collected \$40,000 in settlements, was shot multiple times in his apartment last August, apparently by gunmen trying to rob him of his latest settlement check, for \$17,500.

The city defended the payouts, explaining that its policy of aggressively settling cases removes the risk of a big payout after a costly trial. Noting the city is sued 200 times a week and that claims against the police have increased, Law Department official Connie Pankratz said, "Although we are often successful at trial, it can be more expensive to defend a case than to settle it."