

UPPER WEST SIDE NOW

vol. #01 | November 18, 2010

All The Neighborhood News

COMPLIMENTARY
\$1.00

Deadly Intersection Focuses Attention On Traffic Safety

By Abe Lebovic

Shana Smith was navigating one of the Upper West Side's most dangerous intersections last week when she nervously glanced at the light.

"It's going to start blinking when I'm halfway into the street," said the 40-year-old Upper West Side resident.

The intersection where Amsterdam Avenue, Broadway and 71st Street converge has been dubbed the "Bow-tie of Death." The intersection saw 25 accidents in 2009, and eight accidents in 2010 to date. Over the most recent five-year period it ranked in the top 94th percentile for accident severity at intersections in the city according to city data.

After years of pressure, the DOT recently announced a plan to improve safety at the intersection. The plan includes a countdown timer, curb extensions, more time for pedestrians to cross, providing additional crosswalks and extending the subway station island.

But some of the safety measures aren't going into effect until next year and residents say that's too long.

tive—a non-profit whose mission it is to make New York as pedestrian and bike-friendly as possible—and the local Community Board, but the DOT said they had to study the issue.

The bureaucratic gridlock continued until August 18, 2009 when a taxi careened out of control and ploughed into the cast iron fence surrounding the 72nd Street station headhouse that was erected to protect the frenzied pedestrian traffic on the island of its periphery. Luckily no one was seriously hurt.

"It just crystallized for everybody the problem that exists there," Rosenthal said

A couple of days later Rosenthal sent a letter to Manhattan Borough Commissioner Margaret Furgione requesting that the city finally do something to protect the pedestrians of the busy thoroughfare.

On June 14 of this year two accidents occurred in the span of three hours both resulting in critically injured pedestrians.

After delays and complaints from seniors that they were scared to cross

After years of pressure, the DOT recently announced a plan to improve safety at the intersection.

It takes roughly 50 long, fast steps to cross from the northeast corner of Amsterdam and 71st Street to the northwest corner of Broadway and 71st—the route having a circuitous element as the crosser has to navigate diagonally north and then south to finally reach the other side. And when that crossing signal tells you to walk, it's more like a trot that will get you to the other side before the traffic begins to whiz by at a dizzying pace once again.

Ed Haas, 57, was crossing the same path as Smith and got stuck on the island that houses the southern West 72nd Street subway station.

"I've lived here for 23 years, and they haven't done anything to fix the problem," he said.

"Chances are that if you'd cross, you wouldn't be able to cross the whole way, but get stuck in the middle somewhere."

Upper West Side Assemblywoman Linda Rosenthal has long criticized the DOT for being too slow to remedy the problem. Her office gave the DOT a study they had completed together with Transportation Alterna-

the intersection and ostensibly hearing nothing from the DOT, Rosenthal and Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer held a press conference in August about the dangers of the area.

"Enough about studies," Borough President Stringer said at the press conference. "What we have here is a demonstrably unsafe intersection in a densely populated area of Manhattan's West Side. In the last two years, over thirty accidents have taken place here. With such a risk of a serious injury or even death, waiting is not an option. The DOT needs to act now, not next year."

Haas and Smith said they were grateful for the countdown clocks, although there is not more allotted time given yet for "embarking" on the long crossing (currently, after about 7 seconds of instructions to "walk," it starts blinking with the clock giving you an additional 19 flashing seconds to get to the island.

"I would have probably kept going and got stuck in middle if the clock wasn't there telling me there were only three seconds left," Haas said.



Cruising along the Columbus Avenue bike lane.

Businesses Criticize New Bike Lanes For Jamming Roads

By Roger Zandt

Upper West Side business owners say that the new Columbus Avenue bike lanes are cutting into their profits as they struggle to stay afloat in a tough economy.

"There's nothing wrong with bike lanes, but it will come at a cost," said Bob Schweitzer, the owner of Schweitzer Linen on Columbus Avenue at a Nov. 8 community board meeting "And most of that cost will be borne by merchants and by everybody else down the line."

Schweitzer and other business owners said that trucks are having a hard time making deliveries to store because the bike lanes have swallowed up parking spaces. The new bike lane runs along Columbus between West 96th Street and West 77th Street.

The lanes have removed 67 parking spaces from Columbus Avenue, a Department of Transportation official said at Monday's meeting. The DOT originally told Community Board 7 the new lanes would remove 55 spaces.

Many bike riders say that convenience and safety offered by the bike lane is well worth the loss of the parking spaces. Tila Duhaime of the advocacy group Upper West Side Streets Renaissance said at a Nov. 9 meeting that she is "...convinced that once we've had a chance for the dust to settle ... we'll be happy with this lane."

Community Board 7 plans to form a task force to work with business owners on the bike lane.

IN THE NEWS

Are Community Health Centers The Answer?

The Ryan Center on the Upper West Side is among the community health centers that are set to play an expanded role in the delivery of primary health care in the U.S. Over the next five years, the federal government will pump \$11 billion into these centers to improve access to primary health care.

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City Reconsiders Charter School Move

City officials are reconsidering a new home for West Side Success Academy charter school. West Side Success Academy might not open inside Public School 145, which has fought against the move.

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World's priciest diamond on view at AMNH

The world's most expensive diamond can be seen through January at the American Museum of Natural History. The Wittelsbach-Graff Diamond, a 31.06-carat deep blue gem, costs \$24.3 million.

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When the coffee shop is the office

Upper West Side coffee shops are seeing an influx of patrons who are doing more work than latte sipping. The growing legion of laid-off workers are crowding tables and seeking a sense of community.

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Citizen pruners

Aiming to become what Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg calls the "first environmentally sustainable 21st Century city," New York has promised to plant a million trees. TreesNY has certified more than 11,000 New Yorkers as volunteer tree pruners.

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TINA FEY SAYS THAT SHE LOVES LIVING ON THE UPPER WEST SIDE WITH HER HUSBAND AND FIVE-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER. THE 30 ROCK STAR CALLS THE NEIGHBORHOOD "CHILL." [Page 3](#)



Comedy clubs still laughing

Even in this age of streaming video and on-demand movies, comedy clubs like the Upper West Side's Stand Up NY are still thriving. Could a down economy be making people seek out a few laughs?

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Count calories right

Fitness-equipment manufacturers are adding tools to their gear that they say will help you reach your goals. But can you trust the numbers on their equipment? Some experts question whether tracking calories burned is even worthwhile.

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Are Community Health Centers The Answer?

By Shanthi Venkataraman

The William F. Ryan Community Health Center, located on the Upper West Side, was bustling the other day as patients shuttled in and out of appointments. Community health centers like this one are set to play an expanded role in the delivery of primary health care.

Over the next five years, the federal government will pump \$11 billion into these centers to improve access to primary health care. Of the total funding, \$9.5 billion will be used to expand health centers' operational capacity and enhance their medical-, oral- and behavioral-health services. The remaining \$1.5 billion will allow health centers to expand and improve existing facilities and construct new sites. The funding is expected to double the number of centers across the country and expand the number of patients served by an additional 20 million.

Federally qualified community health centers, as these centers are more formally known, cater to federally designated underserved areas and populations, migrant workers, homeless people, and residents of public housing. These centers provide health care irrespective of a person's ability to pay and are run by a patient-majority community board. There are currently about 1,200 centers that serve more than 8,000 communities, or 20 million people, across the country.

The investment in community health centers is among the few reform measures that have witnessed strong support from both Democrats and Republicans. In fact, community health centers doubled their presence, to 1,200, with the help of \$3.6 billion in funding under the George W. Bush administration. They also received \$2 billion in stimulus money last year to help cope with the increase in demand for their health care services from the uninsured during the recession. But the \$11 billion investment is as much a step toward reforming the delivery of primary health care as it is about meeting increasing demand.

"Adding more money to health centers is a good thing, as it not only offers access to the underserved but also is the right kind of care," says Dan Lowenstein, a spokesman for the Primary Care Development Corp., which helps finance and build community health centers. "It is an excellent model of how health care should be delivered."

Several studies by primary health care policy advocates in recent years have strongly recommended the expansion of community health centers as not only necessary to meet demand in underserved areas but also crucial to lowering health care costs in the long term. "If we treat people before they get sick, we can prevent costlier care that takes place in the hospital emergency room," says Amy Simmons of the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC).

NACHC data estimate that patients living in underserved areas with a



health center have 5.8 fewer hospitalizations per 1,000 people than patients who live in areas that do not have a health center. The average annual cost of care for one health center patient is estimated at \$515, 10 times less than the average per capita spending on personal health care. This is despite the fact that health centers offer an array of services, such as case management, transportation and education.

Simmons attributes the cost effectiveness of community health centers to their "traffic cop approach." Community health centers focus on

just treat the disease and send the patients home." Burns hopes that the funding would help them target more homeless people who have not had access to care and educate patients about the need to seek preventive care.

While there are several incentives in the package that support community health centers, there are big challenges in ramping up to meet the demand from the newly insured. "We are going to double the number of patients we serve in a very short time," says Simmons. "There are going to be challenges in scaling up our opera-

The William F. Ryan Community Health Center, located on the Upper West Side.

Photo by Shanthi Venkataraman/CNS

need health-professional-shortage area for two to four years. It has also enhanced Medicare payments to primary care physicians by 10 percent and requires states to match Medicaid payments to primary care physicians, paying at least 100 percent of that provided by Medicare in 2013 and 2014.

"The incentives are welcome. But my gut is, more will have to be done," says Floyd Willis, chairman of the department of family medicine at the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, Fla. Willis says pay scales need to be aligned with improved health outcomes — how a patient actually fares over time when treated by a doctor — rather than with the number of blood tests ordered and prescriptions written.

Besides the shortage of primary care providers, health centers also face challenges in receiving funding for their regular operations. The federal grants are made only to those centers that can prove that they will be serving a new population. The grant money cannot be used to stabilize existing operations, according to Elizabeth Swain, CEO of the Community Health Care Association of New York State.

And federal spending is still a minor source of their overall funding needs. "The federal funding of \$9.5 billion (the balance, \$1.5 billion, is for extraordinary capital needs) is only 10 percent of what it costs to run these programs. We need to find the remaining 90 percent," says Swain. Nearly 50 percent of funding for health centers comes from Medicaid, which could be affected by state budget cuts. "The Medicaid program

is only as healthy as the state economy," says Swain.

However, Simmons of the NACHC says community health centers have proved resilient even in the recession. In the year that they have received stimulus funding, they have been able to cater to an additional 1.8 million patients, 900,000 of whom were uninsured. And, Simmons adds, "We are looking forward to doing a lot more."

At the Health Care Center for the Homeless in Orlando, Fla., primary care is integrated with behavioral health.

a holistic approach to treatment. A pregnant single woman who is unemployed and has diabetes, for example, would be referred to a diabetes specialist as well as to a social worker and counselor.

At the Health Care Center for the Homeless in Orlando, Fla., primary care is integrated with behavioral health. Bakari Burns, the facility's chief executive officer, says that most of the center's patients are uninsured and have medical conditions — often complicated by mental health problems — that require a special approach. One challenge the center faces is that uninsured patients rarely seek medical help until their condition has considerably worsened. Many choose to then seek emergency care, which often involves only a short-term solution. "Emergency care does not focus on prevention," says Burns. "They

tions so quickly."

Complicating the rise in health care needs is a shortage in the number of primary care physicians as medical students have increasingly gravitated toward specializations that earn more money. The American Academy of Primary Care Physicians estimates that there will be a shortage of 40,000 physicians in 10 years if current trends continue. The NACHC estimates that it will need an additional 15,585 primary care providers and up to 14,397 nurses to serve 30 million patients by 2015.

The health reform package has introduced a number of incentives for primary care providers working in underserved areas, including a \$1.5 billion investment in the National Health Services Corps, which finances medical students throughout their education in exchange for their agreeing to serve in a high-

UPPER WEST SIDE NOW

Editor

Sascha Brodsky

Art Director

Alexey Katalin

Photography

Galya Kovalyova

Contributors

Elizabeth Johnstone, Abe Lebovic, M.R. O'Connor, Ben Postman, Micki Steele

Upper West Side Now

is published by New York Now Media, LLC, 188 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013. (646) 397-7143.

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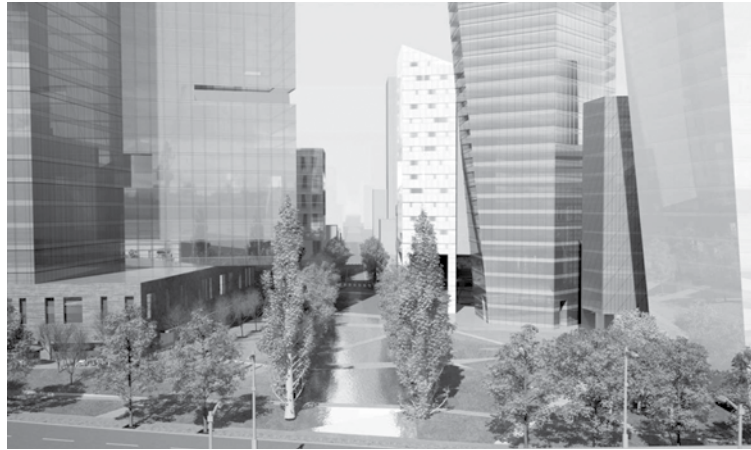
Printed in the USA.

www.upperwestnow.com

Neighborhood In Brief

ADVOCATE CALLS FOR SCHOOL AT RIVERSIDE CENTER

Public advocate Bill de Blasio is asking developers to build a school at the proposed Riverside Center on the Upper West Side. In a statement de Blasio's said he will only support the five-tower development if Extell Development Corporation provides 150,000 square feet of school space on the site. "There is a crying need for a large school on the Upper West Side," de Blasio said in his statement. The City Council is expected to vote on Riverside Center before the end of the year.



GRAND SICHUAN OUTPOST TO OPEN ON UWS

The restaurant chain Grand Sichuan has gained a reputation among foodies for offering some of the more authentic Chinese food in the city. Upper West Side spice lovers get ready. A Grand Sichuan will be opening soon at the location of the former Shark Bar on Amsterdam Avenue and 75th Street.



UWS TO HOST 2011 TONY AWARDS

The Tony Awards are coming to the neighborhood. After losing its long-term space at Radio City Music Hall, the show has found a new home for the 2011 at the Beacon Theatre, award officials announced Nov. 14. The June 12 Broadway awards event will be broadcast live from the Beacon Theatre by CBS.



TINA FEY CALLS UWS "CHILL"

30 Rock star Tina Fey said in a recent interview that she loves living on the Upper West Side with her husband and five-year-old daughter. "You hear that it's obnoxious, but actually the Upper West Side is pretty chill," Fey reportedly said. "I don't want to anger any of our other fine Manhattan 'hoods — no offense, Upper East Side — but I think it's a great place to raise a youngster."

PRICIEST DIAMOND COMES TO AMNH

The American Museum of Natural History is hosting the world's most expensive diamond. The 31.06-carat Wittelsbach-Graff Diamond is on view at the Harry Frank Guggenheim Hall of Minerals. In 2008, the Wittelsbach was sold at Christie's London to jeweler Lawrence Graff for just over \$24.3 million, the highest recorded price for any jewel.

ED OFFICIALS RECONSIDER CHARTER MOVE

A controversial charter school may not be moving into an upper West Side school after all. Education department officials say that West Side Success Academy might not open inside Public School 145 as planned. Officials are reportedly considering whether to move public middle school West Prep Academy into PS 145 instead.

BIKERS RALLY TO LANES' DEFENSE

A Nov. 4 Community Board 7 meeting was jammed with bikers eager to defend the new Upper West Side bike lanes. Opponents of the lanes were also vocal, saying they are causing traffic snarls and hurting small businesses. The city added the bike lane to Columbus Avenue between West 96th Street and West 77th Street earlier this year.

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When The Office Is A Coffee Shop, It's A Different Buzz

Laptops Trump Lattes

By Jill Colvin

Antony Seeff, sits with his MacBook and BlackBerry in a Starbucks on the Upper West Side. It's a Friday morning, and the location's already buzzing with workers tapping at keyboards and scrawling on notepads as a line of customers snakes to the door.

"Only in a recession are there this many people in a Starbucks at 11 o'clock," Seeff says with a smile, taking a break from the new social media site he's designing after losing his job at a hedge fund earlier this year.

Despite Starbucks' reputation for \$4 Frappuccinos and overpriced pastries, employees and regulars there and at other Wi-Fi hot spots have noticed something unexpected: Branches are actually busier since the recession began. And while the growing legions of laid-off workers like Seeff who've turned to freelancing and entrepreneurship because of the crash are not the only ones crowding tables and hogging chairs, cafes have become prime office space, providing normalcy and a sense of community—all for the price of a coffee, or less.

Even before the economic downturn, the nation's independent workforce was growing, with more than 10 million independent contractors, consultants and freelancers in February 2005, according to Steve Hipple of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. But in recent months, their numbers have soared, with Web sites such as oDesk, which matches employees with independent contractors, reporting an increase of 450 percent.

"Coffee shops are literally packed," says Paul Benedetto, 40, a Seattle-based freelance accountant who left his corporate position for self-employment last year. While he always brings his computer along on caffeine trips just in case he finds an available seat, it's so crowded that he's usually forced to take his drink to go.

Baristas say it's not unusual to watch workers come in with laptops in the morning, set up shop and spend entire days typing, taking phone calls and holding meetings in their stores. By late afternoon, tables are littered with empty cups and discarded food wrappers as workers pack up and move on.

While numbers vary by location, most estimate an increase of 15 to 30 percent.

Though working from home may be cheaper, psychologists say that for laid-off workers confronting a massive lifestyle change, rebuilding a routine and finding ways to be around others can be extremely beneficial.

"Maintaining a sense of structure and routine is crucial," says Ethan Seidman, a licensed psychologist and clinical instructor at the Harvard Medical School in Cambridge, Mass., who deals frequently with those who've lost their jobs.

"It just got so claustrophobic," says Seeff, describing the days he spent working from home before venturing down the block. "It's depressing spending the whole day in your apartment," he says. "You need to see people and get out."

Veterans of the coffee-shop-office lifestyle tend to choose one or two cafes based on proximity or furniture and return again and again, forming bonds with those with whom they share their workplace. (Most also have a favorite table and can become highly protective of their chosen spot.)

"The whole problem with the Internet is people's lack of communities and interactions," says Doug Lange, 51, who's been running his online business from the same coffee shop in New York City nearly every day for the past year. "Starbucks has become a community."

Before the days of Wi-Fi, he says, he would "sit inside like a vegetable." Now he lounges comfortably for four to six hours a day, in gray woolen socks and a white T-shirt, on a red velveteen sofa behind a table stocked with his laptop, newspaper, phones, headsets and notebooks.

While he and other regulars at cafes across the country don't typically consider themselves close friends, they nod hello, stop to chat and are ready to offer advice when asked.

Some, including Lange, have also made business contacts from random encounters.

"I feel as if this is my office," explains Rick Eisenberg, a public relations specialist who has been working out of coffee shops for about 10 years and comes to the same Starbucks, another location on the Upper West Side, "just about every day."

"Isolation is not good for anyone, not good for me," he says. "I just like to know that when I walk out the door and come here, maybe there will be some type of adventure."

Just then, Eisenberg sees Randy Schein, an actor and business owner who works from the same branch two to three times a week. Eisenberg waves at his "office partner," who stops by for a brief chat. The two have collaborated on projects in the past.

Sociologists say this type of interaction is important. "People need to feel that they're part of larger communities," says Penny Gurstein, a



Formerly employed at a hedge fund, Antony Seeff has discovered he prefers designing his new social networking site at his local Starbucks more than at home. *Photo by Jill Colvin*



Doug Lange has been running his online business from the same Starbucks in for the past year. He usually spends four to six hours a day working from his favorite spot. *Photo by Jill Colvin*

professor at the School of Community and Regional Planning at the University of British Columbia who wrote a book about the then emerging world of "telework" in 2001.

These cafe "workistas" also say that being out and about helps them stay focused on their projects when they have little other supervision.

Natasha Levitan, 32, a multimedia producer in San Jose, Calif., who usually alternates between cafes Bar Code and Crema, has been freelancing for about five years. She says that being surrounded by others provides the social pressure needed to keep her on task.

"If you take your eye away from the computer, you can see other people who are concentrating on their own work, so it makes you go back to yours," she explains.

These social cues are one reason it's so important to establish a clear separation between home and work, says Illinois Institute of Technology sociologist Christena Nippert-Eng,

author of "Home and Work: Negotiating Boundaries Through Everyday Life." The simple process of getting up, getting dressed and traveling to a social environment can serve as a trigger, telling the brain that it's time to produce.

"It's sort of channeling the sociability of the environment to help you transition into that work frame of mind and to be able to sustain that through the day," she explains.

But just because these shops are buzzing doesn't mean they're profiting from their popularity. At Starbucks, for instance, domestic sales have slumped, down an additional 10 percent in its last fiscal quarter, and the company says it will close more than 900 stores.

That's in part because, even if they're there all day, workistas report purchasing only one or two drinks per visit and often benefit from free or discounted refills, not to mention Internet connections. Some customers have also developed elaborate

strategies for spending as little as they can at the counter.

One Starbucks barista, who would not give her name for fear of losing her job, describes how some order single espresso shots and add lots of milk, creating knockoff lattes for dollars less. Others buy only a tea bag—cheaper than a cup—or bring one and just ask for hot water. Some spend the day consuming free samples of food and drinks. The chain has a "Just say yes" policy, the barista says.

While some companies have imposed minimum ordering rules and even covered up power outlets to curb this sort of straggling, others, including Starbucks, have thus far refused to do so. "It's clear Starbucks' company has the attitude that it's OK," says Lange, who orders a single tea or latte or doesn't bother at all, bringing a cheaper cup of joe in from the street. But he pays for Internet access every day.

"The place is expensive," he says. "I don't feel bad."

Citizen Pruners

Volunteers Keep City Green

By Jill Colvin

A few years back, an arborist noticed the branch of a linden tree protruding over a Manhattan street. She decided to amputate on the spot. But the owner of a nearby restaurant was watching, and threatened to call the police. That's when the arborist pulled out a laminated badge that read "CITIZEN PRUNER."

The arborist had been trained and certified by TreesNY, a not for profit group playing a central role in New York City's efforts to combat climate change. Aiming to become what Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg calls

volunteers. That is where TreesNY comes in.

"All of our programs are designed to help us meet our mission, which is to plant, preserve, and protect New York City street trees," said Maeve Bacer, project manager for TreesNY, which has so far certified 11,000 New Yorkers as volunteer tree pruners.

How The People Got the Job

TreesNY was founded during the city's fiscal crisis of the 1970s, when the budget of the Department of



Volunteer arborists prune trees that need it.

Photo by Thomas Lueck

All of our programs are designed to help us meet our mission, which is to plant, preserve, and protect New York City street trees.

the "first environmentally sustainable 21st Century city," New York has promised to plant a million trees. But it has scant resources to care for young trees once they take root in a hostile urban environment.

It has left the task largely to citizen

Parks and Recreation was slashed. One important casualty seemed certain to be trees. So a small group of citizens got together to rescue the urban forest from a bad fate.

Their efforts gradually took root: TreesNY obtained funding from pri-

vate foundations, conducted an annual end-of-the-year appeal and attracted volunteers.

Hurdles remained. In a city where the soil is far from ideal, trucks demolish low limbs and dogs constantly urinate on trunks, nurturing trees is difficult. The mission became recruiting more volunteers.

"A lot of them organize their own neighborhoods," Bacer said. "We love that."

But conflicts abound. Not everyone is willing to care for - or even wants - trees in their neighborhood.

"There are three kinds of people," Bacer said. "Those who love trees, those who don't know much about them but develop a respect once they learn more about them, and there are

people that know the trees but just don't like them."

So skirmishes ensue. People rail against the mess made by leaves and branches falling from their neighbors' trees. If not for those trees in the sidewalk, some will argue, the dogs would stay away.

"It's like a toilet outside of my restaurant!" a restaurateur once told Bacer.

Some, like the infamous "Tree Killer" of Astoria, do more than complain. In 1995, Andrew Campanile, a city firefighter, was arrested for forging a city work permit when he led a crew that cut down eight trees.

Still, city planners say the benefits of an urban forest far outweigh its problems.

Pet-Sitting No Longer For The Neighborhood Kid

By Erin Schultz

Without hesitation, Monty, a three-year-old goldendoodle, jumped into the arms of Nilo Silva one chilly March morning at a Riverside Park dog run on the Upper West Side.

The big curly dog, an odd but cute mix between a golden retriever and a standard poodle, wrapped his paws around the man.

"He thinks he's a lapdog," said Silva, laughing and dodging exuberant dog kisses.

Silva loves the dog, and the feeling is obviously mutual. But he has to maintain an emotional distance; at the end of the day, big, floppy adorable Monty will return to the arms of another.

Silva owns Doggy Love, a dog-sitting service that comes to the pet's home each day and plays with it while the owner is off working or traveling. After his 13 years in the business, he and his colleagues are out to debunk the myth that pet-sitting is still the casual once-a-day job easily left to the neighbor's kid.

Last fall, the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters (NAPPS) touts pet-sitting as a sort of day care for dogs that beats lying around the house, and a far better alternative to kennels for pet owners who travel.

With an estimated 157 million pet

owners in the United States--many of whom work full time or spend a lot of time away from home, or both--pet-sitting has become big business. According to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, pet owners are expected to spend over \$3 billion this year on doggy day care, "luxury" pet hotels and professional pet sitters.

NAPPS argues that pets get better care from a professional sitter than they do at traditional kennels, where they are more likely to be exposed to sickness and can become stressed in a strange environment.

Sharon Jones, who owns Guardian Pet Sitters, said pet-sitting is serious work.

"This is not a fun hobby," she said.

A life-long animal-lover, Jones quit a day job in the oil and gas industry 16 years ago to dive into pet-sitting. Jones and her part-time staff of 22 take care of all sorts of animals, from dogs and cats to rats and guinea pigs, and the occasional domestic potbellied pig ("They're just messy," she said).

Jones prefers part-time employees in order to keep stress levels low and attention-giving high. But no matter how many of her staffers would like to think of themselves as "ani-

mal whisperers," she said, cats still freak out.

One female cat became territorial with an employee who was leaning down to clean her litter box. The cat took a swipe at the employee's eyes.

"Good thing she was declawed," said Jones.

Silva takes care of dogs exclusively and charges \$40 to \$50 a day per dog for wealthy pet owners on the Upper West Side.

"I wish I made what these people pay in taxes," he said.

Silva said it's a rewarding but exhausting job, with 11-hour days of walking, running, constant attention-giving, and lots of belly rubbing. Silva will spend time with five to 10 dogs each day, and will also foot the bill if one of his canine clients gets sick or injured under his watch, which happens on occasion.

When his clients travel, he takes the dogs to his own home in Queens where he offers kennel services. But even owners who can't afford Silva's level of care can find something cozier than a cage for their beloved.

Even traditional kennels have realized that many pet owners are willing to pay for a bit of luxury.

"They are becoming very nice places," said Cathi Denham, the



Nilo Silva, owner of a pet sitting company, holds Monty, an affectionate goldendoodle, at a dog run in New York City

Photo by Julie Hau

owner of At Home Pet Sitters in Savannah, Ga.

Wayne Gruen owns Kamp Kanine in Little Falls, N.J. He calls his facility a cross between a luxury hotel and a children's day-care for dogs and "a few good cats."

For \$35 a day, he offers 24-hour staffing with playtime and flat-screen TV viewing to help soothe the animals to sleep. He also has massage and aromatherapy sessions for older and injured dogs. For those who scoff, Gruen said massage greatly improved the quality of life for his dog Frieda, a rescue from Hurricane Katrina, after she lost one of her hind legs.

"The benefit of the street tree is not to the individual owner, but to the community as a whole," said Nelson Villarrubia, the director of programs and development at TreesNY.

Then TreesNY was chosen to lead volunteer tree maintenance in Manhattan.

"It provides an added boost to our visibility," said Villarrubia.

So far, more than 300,000 new trees have been planted across the city's five boroughs. "Theoretically, the plan is great. But there's always a huge gap between caring and implementation," said Bacer.

Indeed, some citizen pruners argue that the city's tree planting campaign is moving too fast. They say more money should be spent on caring for existing trees instead of planting new ones.

"They are planting like crazy, and they just don't come back because they don't have time," said Tracey Hohman, a TreesNY alumni and certified pruner in Brooklyn.

Volunteers pay \$100 for the course, attend eight hours of classroom training and eventually become licensed pruners.

"The range of people these classes attract is really cool," said Bacer.

"I'm kind of humbled by the whole experience," said Larry Diamond, an investment banker, who stumbled into becoming a citizen pruner. Initially, he said, he had little interest in trees, but wanted to include the initials "C.P." on his business card, suggesting that he might be a certified public accountant.

"The trend is now toward holistic health," he said.

Gruen also holds an annual Halloween costume contest for his canine clientele.

"The winner last year was a black and white papillon dressed like a skunk," he said. "Very cute."

Back at Riverside Park, Silva said he looks for a reliable person in a pet sitter--and someone who can keep up with the pace of doing it full time. He said potential employees don't have to have a lot of experience with dogs specifically, but his employees do have to love animals.

Samuel Reis, a full-time Doggy Love employee into his seventh year, meets those qualifications.

"They are my life," said Reis, 31, of his charges.

A native of Brazil, Reis speaks little English and has trouble communicating in the human world of New York City. But he can speak to these dogs. He knows all their names--Monty the goldendoodle, Carly the black lab, Emmet the standard poodle, Nally the beagle mix, Orion the pit bull. He knows their temperaments and personalities.

And they listen. As the dogs gathered around him, bright-eyed and barking, poised to play catch, it was as if they were his own.

Getting too attached is an emotional danger for both the dog and the sitter, said Silva, but that is a natural part of the job.

"I can tell some dogs don't want to go back to their owners," he said, turning toward Jack, an affectionate black-and-white border collie.

Comedy Clubs Get The Last Laugh

Comedian Lee Camp Still Has His Gigs -- Though No One Is Counting On Anything.

By Elizabeth Johnstone

At the Stand-Up NY Comedy Club! on the Upper West Side, the crowd was roaring the other night.

The success of clubs like this one is partly thanks to the efforts of people like Keemo, a smooth-talking young man with a friendly smile, spends his Friday nights on the corner wearing a blue shirt and yellow sign. He might ask you if you like stand-up comedy. If you say yes, he'll whisk you three busy blocks west — dodging tourists and hurtling past the closing Virgin Megastore — before ushering you down a dingy flight of stairs under Sweet Caroline's Dueling Pianos.

The club down there — Ha! Comedy Club NYC — is anonymous and unheralded. More importantly, it's in a basement. One wonders: how do little places like Ha!, in such a bad time for any sort of business, stay open, when even the ten-dollar DVD meccas cannot keep up?

According to stand-up comedian and Ha performer Shawn Cornelius, the club stays afloat mostly due to its tourist-centric location (West 46th and 7th Avenue) and the efforts of guys like Keemo, who are paid to grab tourists off the streets of Times Square and fill the seats.

But comedy is also verifiably popular in times like these.

Three years ago, Cornelius quit his day job as a mentor to focus on comedy full time. He usually found work around this time at ski resorts, but thanks to the souring economy, fewer people are taking trips, and the pay dwindled. But his regular comedy gigs, for college performances and clubs, weren't affected.

"People are gonna come out and laugh," Cornelius said. "We laugh at stuff like this, you know, we laugh at the economy. 'We as comedians, it's our duty to keep things going.'"

History seems to support theory of comedy thriving amid economic crisis. Over 300 comedy clubs opened across the country between 1978 and 1988, and the number of stand-up comedians rose. Wall Street was devastated after October 19, 1987, when the Dow Jones Industrial Average sank 22.6 percent, the second largest one-day percentage decline in U.S. stock market history. But subsequent New York Times headlines, such as "Market for Humor Still Bullish" (1987) and "Laughter: the Best Medicine for Stress" (1989) suggest that the humor business was relatively stable.

Stand-up comedian Liz Miele pointed out that comics have always been good at making fun of finances.



"We laugh at stuff like this, you know, we laugh at the economy. 'We as comedians, it's our duty to keep things going.'"

"We all have our struggling artist jokes," Miele said. "What I ask [audience members] is, 'what do you do?' I would say that at least a third of the audience is unemployed. They're in between jobs; they are bartending now when they didn't before."

Miele works part-time as a nanny and still comes up short on rent. She plans to move to a cheaper apartment, a goal that conflicts with her desire to quit the nannying job.

"With the economy...it's actually a scary time to let go of that safety net," Miele said.

Lee Camp, a stand-up comedian and writer who recently appeared on the PBS series "Make 'Em Laugh: America's Funny Business," might recommend she hang on to it. Camp quit his day job about five years ago. Now, the college performances he relies upon are threatened by university budget cuts.

"If you have a secondary job, then I think it's a fine time [to be a comedian]. But in terms of throwing off the second job and giving it a go, I would imagine it would be difficult," Camp said. "Clubs are falling back on comedians that they know can fill the room, and obviously a newcomer can't do that."

He added, "It's a very tough time for me, and I've been making a living at it for five years."

Kevin Carolan, a performer since 1993, thinks comedy will continue to thrive, because a night in a comedy club is still a relatively inexpensive way to spend an evening.

"If things get slow enough, a club could cut back on its number of shows, and that will

trickle down some hurt to the comics that have to fight for less slots," he said. "But that's on a smaller, local level. Bookers will be the ones responsible for filling the bigger clubs, and I don't think that'll slow down too much."

Laura Newmark, a comedy talent manager with the New York City-based Beatrix Klein Management, confirmed that bookers are looking for well-known talent to draw crowds.

"If you don't have a fan base, they don't really want you," Miele said of the bigger clubs. "They want somebody who can put people in the seats. Our business, for club owners, is about alcohol. It's not about comedy."

Though recession has hit Illinois especially hard, Cate Freedman, an improvisational and sketch comic who performs at Second City and Improv Olympics in Chicago, said Second City's comedy conservatory continues to flourish. The conservatory started with one classroom behind the theater and now occupies several floors in an adjacent building.

Facebook, MySpace and YouTube have also become new outlets for humor, and marketing tools for comedians, who can book themselves into shows if they can parlay online success into a club-going, drink-buying fan base.

"People aren't going to sit by their TVs all day," Camp said. "As long as you're still in your house, you're not truly free of your daily grind, your fears of unemployment, your fears of the mortgage. So a bad economy could actually create a resurgence for live comedy."

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Shoppers At The Farmers Market

Eating Local When Local's Buried Under Snow

By Micki Steele



New Yorker Keith Chappelle, an actor is shopping at a farmers market on a cold February afternoon, inspecting fresh vegetables with one hand and carrying a Whole Foods reusable bag in the other. He has spent the last year revamping his diet and the way he shops for food. His "journey," as he calls it, from the "industrial food chain" to local and seasonal food hasn't been easy.

Chappelle is a locavore, a term that was added to the New American Oxford Dictionary in 2007 to describe food buyers, sellers and growers of locally farmed produce and livestock.

He says his monthly grocery bill of \$400 goes to local food 90 percent of the time now, with Whole Foods as a backup. And although he has adjusted to eating only what's available locally and seasonally, it can be more expensive. He spent \$3 for a pound and a half of turkey thighs at the farmers market, which would have cost him about 50 cents less at his neighborhood grocer. But he's determined.

"I won't eat tomatoes in winter," he said. "If you eat a tomato at the farmers market, it's probably been grown in a greenhouse – makes it a little more expensive – the flavor is almost there, but I don't eat it – but when spring comes, they'll be plentiful, they'll be cheaper, and they'll be more flavorful and I look forward to it."

Chappelle is learning to create savory meals with seasonal foods, especially root vegetables. Today he's planning a three-course dinner for friends with meat and produce from the farmers market and "odds and ends" from Whole Foods: carrot soup, turkey thighs, homemade bread and baked apples.

Locavores say the situation is not so dire, and small- and mid-scale farms do the best job of producing whole foods – little "w," little "f." Though experts can't agree on exactly how local is local, they still contend that Americans need a variety of local foods, which are better tasting and higher in nutritional density, to promote good health. Local foods also protect the environment by reducing the amount of fuel used for shipping and support local economies by keep-

ing farm families employed.

Many locavores say that buying foods labeled "organic" at a conventional grocer isn't the answer.

Timothy Wersan of Windfall Farms in Montgomery, N.Y., a small town with a population of about 5,000 just 80 miles north of New York City, says the United States Department of Agriculture keeps a "dirty secret" when it comes to the definition of organic.

"They constantly try to make inroads into what 'organic' means, in terms of making the organic standards more lax, making it more like traditional industrial agriculture," he said.

The USDA allows some synthetic substances in the production of "certified organic" foods, including isopropanol and ethanol, used to kill algae; peracetic acid, used to disinfect equipment and seed; and tetracycline, an antibiotic also used to control fire blight, a bacterial disease that strikes trees.

Wersan doesn't use any of it. "We use untreated seed, so no chemicals from the get-go," he said of Windfall Farms' 200 unusual vegetable varieties, including sunflower and buckwheat greens, ball turnips and watermelon radishes. "And we don't use any sprays and no 'organic' sprays."

In fact, locavores no longer use the word "organic." On a food label, it may indicate that plant fertilizer or livestock feed is chemical-free, but it does not mean that industrial food production methods have been eliminated from the process.

"Pork that comes out of a confined animal feeding operation 10 miles from where you live is no different than the pork that comes out of a confined animal feeding operation a thousand miles from where you live," said John Ikerd, professor emeritus of agricultural economics at the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Ikerd worries that farm animals raised in confined production environments where they are routinely fed antibiotics and growth hormones are beginning to resist these drugs, which could lead to new diseases among animals and humans.

But "local" is an equally elusive concept. "There is no agreed-upon definition of what local is," said

Gail Feenstra, food systems coordinator for the University of California-Davis Sustainable Agricultural Research and Education Program and the Agricultural Sustainability Institute. "Some food service companies might say 200, 250 miles, others say 300, and others say a day's drive for a farmer." Much of the produce sold by a conventional grocer has traveled over 1,500 miles by the time it's served for dinner.

So what's a well-intentioned, environmentally aware eater to do?

Locavores and experts in sustainable agriculture encourage the expansion of local food systems through universities, eco-farming conferences and community-supported agriculture programs, or CSAs.

Ikerd and his wife Ellen belong to a CSA and pay about \$600 before the start of the season for what's called a "half-share" of fresh produce for 25 weeks in summer and fall. A full-share costs about \$850 and is better suited for larger families. The Ikerds pick up their "share" each week at a farm that's less than 10 miles away from their home. They get seven or eight different vegetables, but the varieties depend on availability. There was a shortage of squash last fall because of heavy rains in Missouri, so instead they're feasting on Swiss chard, beets, garlic and spinach. They freeze a portion of everything they buy to enjoy throughout the winter months.

Introduced in the United States in the mid-1980s, there are more than 400 CSAs today in New England, the Mid-Atlantic and Great Lakes regions and the West Coast.

Another option is to shop local and focus on farmers' markets, like Chappelle, a strategy that encourages "traditional eating methods," like less meat and more vegetables, he says. Chappelle reviews farm Web sites and pamphlets to get some of the information he needs to evaluate a farm.

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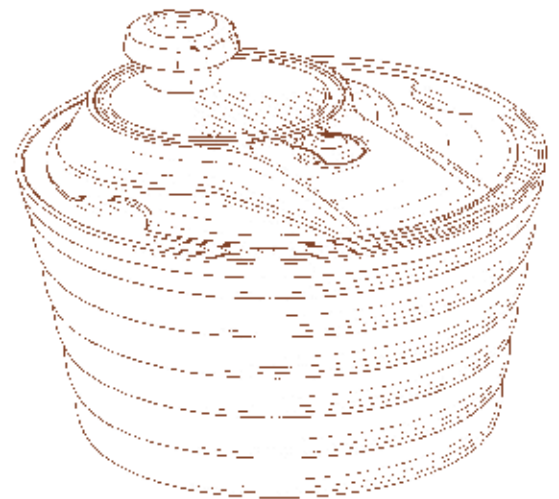
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Cook's Tour: A Gadget (Or Three) For Every Kitchen Task

By M.R. O'Connor

For years, Wendy Ries would chop up lettuce for salads, miffed that the left-over end of the lettuce head would inevitably turn partly brown. Convinced the lettuce was oxidizing from being cut with a metal knife, her husband George invented the world's first "lettuce knife," which consists of a sharply serrated blade made of plastic.

"You can cut lettuce with the lettuce knife and leave it for a week and it won't turn brown," he said

Now the Rieses sell tens of thousands of their patented lettuce knives every year. However the inventions are arrived at, kitchen supply stores these days display a plethora of other unique gadgets: citrus zesters, reamers, squeezers and peelers; flat whisks, egg whisks and collapsible whisks; avocado slicers, papaya scoops and salad spinners.

With thousands of items on the market, the number and variety of kitchen tools available to novice chefs and gourmards alike is extraordinary. According to the trade magazine Home World Business, the kitchen gadget industry in the United States is worth just under \$1 billion a year.

"With the growth of interest in cooking and food over the past few decades," said Lisa McManus, senior editor of Cook's Illustrated magazine in Boston, "has come a similar growth in kitchen gadgets to appeal to home cooks."

The surge of innovation in kitchen tool inventions is also the result of new technologies: computer-assisted design processes and breakthroughs in the use of materials such as soft plastics and heat-resistant rubbers, according to Matthew Bird, who worked in design manufacturing.

"New materials and new processes lead to new shapes that you couldn't make before," said Bird. For example, companies like OXO International use computer renderings and stereolithography--a production technology that used lasers to create 3-D polyurethane models--to create kitchen gadgets like the one-handed salad spinner.

Kitchen gadgets have a long and rich history. According to some accounts, over 500 patents for apple peelers were submitted to the United States Patent and Trademark Office in the 1800s. Some gadgets, like the eggbeater, have a particular hold on inventors' imaginations.

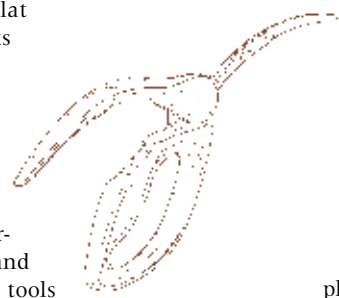
In "The Eggbeater Chronicles," (Thornton, 1999), author Don Thornton details the history of this kitchen utensil through descriptions and pictures of 700 different eggbeater designs, including water-powered, rotary cranks and glass plunger models.

According to Richard J. Apley, a patent lawyer in Arlington, Va., and former director at the United States patent office, the number of kitchen gadget inventions is astonishing in part because they are generally so low-tech.

For instance, there are over 12,000 registered patents in the United States just for cutlery--a field that includes can-openers, vegetable peelers and forks, said Apley. That number is comparable to all the hand-held tools patented since 1790, when the patent office first opened. "How many ways can you think of making a fork?" asks Apley.

But not all ideas for kitchen gadgets become best-sellers. Leslie Fontana, head of the industrial design department at Rhode Island School of Design, said inventions succeed because the design is borne of a need. "If the need is pure and well-defined you can create a specific object that accomplishes that need exactly, and that's good design," said Fontana.

ON THE TOP: OXO International's innovative one-handed salad spinner. **IN THE MIDDLE:** Chef'n inventor David Holcomb's shrimp deveiner. *Courtesy of United States Patent and Trademark Office.*



Feeling Blue? Happy Half-Birthday To You!

When Robin Lentz Was A Little Girl, She Felt She Had The Saddest Birthdays.

By Della Hasselle

For her, the most important day of the year occurred on the shortest one. Even worse, it was only four days before Christmas. It would already be dark outside before she got to start her party. Many of her friends wouldn't be around because they had already left town for the holidays. But the worst part was the gift giving, says Lentz, now 43.

"They would do unthinkable things with gifts that they'd never do with a summer birthday," the New York City art teacher said. "They would give me

tices. The reasons are many. For some, it's a family tradition passed down from generation to generation. A few began the family celebration as a way to keep peace during a sibling's birthday. For others, it all started as a joke, and some are even making a business out of selling it. Some parents, however, believe the half-birthday is not an innocent recognition of coming of age. Instead, the extravagance of celebrating another birthday, some children's experts say, can lead to entitlement and

birthdays. Cecelia Trenticosta, an attorney in New Orleans, was always envious when her younger brother, Miles, got to celebrate his birthday on Feb. 17. Since he was born only a few days before she turned 6 1/2, her parents let her have a small celebration with a dessert of her choice on her half-birthday so she wouldn't get jealous.

"That's how our parents made us feel special when it was the other one's birthday," said Trenticosta. She always picked a traditional king cake, a doughnut-shaped pastry with purple, green and gold sugar on top, since her birthday falls during the Mardi Gras season.

Trenticosta, who recently turned 26 1/2, still gets text messages from her brother to acknowledge the day, for tradition's sake.

For some of the younger celebrators, the tradition is still new — but no less beloved. Piper Lentz, Robin's 6-year-old daughter, loves having two birthdays every year. She does it just for fun, she says, and got the tradition from her mom.

"It's cool because you kind of really get some presents, and we don't do presents a lot," said Piper, who plans to go to Chuck E. Cheese this year.

While many think half-birthdays are silly, some say that is exactly why they love celebrating them. Tess Opalka, 15 and almost 3/4, started marking her half-birthday in Michigan a few years ago. At first it was just a joke, she says, but now she does it every year on Dec. 21 with her friends.

"My friends used to think it was odd that I celebrated my half-birthday, but now they celebrate theirs too," Opalka said. "We usually get each other small presents or cards."

Sometimes, she will celebrate by



Keaton Stepp celebrates his 2 1/2 birthday.

Photo by Michelle Stepp

While many think half-birthdays are silly, some say that is exactly why they love celebrating them.

a pair of earrings and say one earring was for my birthday and the other for Christmas."

Then her mother got an idea from one of the neighbors. One day, in the middle of summer — June 21, to be exact — Lentz came home to find half a cake and her family waiting for her. They sang, "Hap— Bir— t— Y—" and threw her a party. Her half-birthday, "a crazy, secret family tradition," was born.

"My parents were really, really great at traditions," Lentz said. "For little kids, turning something and a half is really a big deal."

It may seem odd, but some people across America celebrate their half-birthdays with a slew of quirky prac-

obsession.

Half-birthdays are measured by adding six months to the date of the original birthday. But that system can prove problematic for those born on certain days, like Aug. 31.

Fortunately, several Web sites called half-birthday calculators have popped up, using a numerical system to predict the halfway mark from one year to the next. According to these sites, the half-birthday is precisely 182.5 days from your exact date of birth — meaning that whenever it falls, every child gets the opportunity to celebrate.

For the Trenticosta family, the half-birthday was all about maintaining a sense of equality around children's

Son, Get Your Hands On My iPhone Right Now!

By Stephanie Marcus

Last year, Zidane Afridi destroyed his parents' laptop. The computer, still under its standard yearlong warranty, was no match for the toddler, who spilled his water all over it. Despite this, the smiling Manhattanite hasn't had his technology privileges completely revoked. While members of the Afridi family have learned that babies and laptops don't mix, according to his mom, Suzy, they have yet to make that call when it comes to their iPhone.

And at age 2 1/2, Zidane may be well on his way to being able to text before he's able to write his name. The Afridis are among the growing number of parents using their iPhones, laptops and other gadgets — pricey ones — that aren't coated in orange plastic and bear the Fisher-Price stamp to entertain and educate their children.

"He watches mostly kids' shows like 'Dora the Explorer,'" said Suzy, 35, a stay-at-home mom studying to be a CPA. "Or we try to find him Arabic cartoons, ones we used to like when we were young."

The family uses YouTube as a way to keep culture alive at home. Mom and Dad search for videos in Arabic and English that teach their son the basics, like the alphabet, colors and numbers, said 34-year-old Sakib, a creative director at an advertising agency in New York.

"Some of it is educational, but he loves to watch himself," said Sakib, whose son's belly-dancing video has had 200 views online.

But if you think that handing an expensive piece of technology to a drooling toddler with chubby hands and unrefined motor skills seems counterproductive to keeping your iPhone alive, well, you might be in



the minority.

According to "iLearn," a report released last November by the Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop, nearly half of the 100 top-selling applications from the iPhone App Store education section were targeted at preschool or elementary school children, and 60 percent of the 25 top-selling apps were targeted at tod-

opening a Christmas present a few days early. Opalka became so excited about the half-birthday, she even made a Facebook page for it, which now has 278 fans. She says that anytime people make fun of her, she invites them to join her page and find out what all the fuss is about.

"I'd rather have two birthdays than one," Opalka said.

The half-birthday is such a popular idea that many people are marketing it, posting party ideas on blogs or profiting from creative half-birthday creations by writing about them.

Michelle Stepp, a party planner in

Nashville, Tenn., put the ideas she had celebrating her son's half-birthday on her Web site to promote her business, Everyday Celebrating. Keaton Stepp, who will turn 3 1/2 on June 7, had a fully iced half-cake and balloon animals for his special day last year. His mother offers ideas on how to ice and decorate the cake and where to get inexpensive decorations for free on her blog.

"We are just starting out, but we hope to have the half-cake and add to the traditions every year," said Stepp, 39. "Half-birthdays are a perfect way to mark a milestone in a different season."

But not all parents are as eager to embrace YouTube's possibilities for their children. Though Alison Guiar is aware of YouTube's educational potential — she has found instructional origami videos that her youngest daughter enjoyed — she is simply too wary of the site to allow her two girls, ages 7 and 11, to explore it alone, and she limits their computer time to school-related activities.

Guia's concern is why sites like Totlol.com were created.

Totlol is a kid-friendly, community-moderated site that allows parents to benefit from a like-minded community that moderates the site's content. Ron Ilan, 39, the site's designer and father of a 4-year-old boy and 2-year-old girl, said, "This results in a selection that is appropriate, relevant and unrestricted. It also empowers parents."

Screen shot by Stephanie Marcus

dlers or preschoolers.

Tech-savvy parents have learned they can empower themselves by picking and choosing the type of media they want to expose their children to.

And according to Nielsen VideoCensus, in August 2009, more children under the age of 13 watched videos on YouTube than on Disney.com, Nick.com or Cartoon Network combined. Surprising, since YouTube's official terms of use say it is not a kid-friendly site.

Tell that to Inbal Brenner, a busy mom who invites the innovative help into her home. The 36-year-old cellist is mother of 5-year-old Ariel and 3 1/2-year-old twins Shira and Joseph. Brenner uses YouTube as a creative way to integrate the Hebrew language into her children's lives.

She also lets her kids play games on her iPhone but is very conscious of

Surgery On Demand: Doctors And Patients Get Real On Camera



By Michele Hoos

When Suzanne Lamoureux was told she had multiple sclerosis four days before she graduated from college, she was sure her life was over. Determined to fight back, she got a tattoo across her lower back of serpents woven together—a mystical talisman from “The Never-ending Story,” which guides the protagonist to find a cure for an ailing queen. But Lamoureux’s condition only worsened. By the age of 31, she could not walk without the help of a cane.

Her tattoo now appears in a health care video on the Web site OR-live.com, an Internet broadcasting company based in West Hartford, Conn.

In September, she allowed cameras to tape the implantation of two wires in her spine connected to a small, pain-suppressing neurostimulation device.

Dr. Robert Sheu of Beth Israel Medical Center in New York performed the surgery. Eight weeks later, Lamoureux and Sheu participated in a webcast on chronic pain management. “I have my life back now,” said Lamoureux, a third grade teacher who now lives in Florida. “If this video might give another person that chance, then that’s my goal.”

Now that the Internet supports faster video streaming, thousands of health care segments are proliferating online, from professionally produced programs to video bloggers telling stories about their latest office visit. Physicians and hospitals are also using video to webcast live surgeries, to communicate with and to educate patients, and largely, to market their services.

“Ten years ago a physician having a Web site was a novelty,” said Dr. Ed Fotsch, CEO of Medem Inc., a San Francisco company that provides a suite of online services called iHealth. “Three or four years ago physicians having a Web site with a picture and e-mail was a novelty. Video is the next step.”

OR-Live has documented surgeries ranging

from heart transplants to gastric bypass. Forty percent of viewers are surgical candidates.

In private practice, more and more physicians are taking advantage of this technology by offering video welcomes and virtual tours.

While these online videos may be very sophisticated, they’re not the most innovative use of technology, said Dr. Jay Parkinson, who is known as the “virtual doctor” in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

Parkinson combines old medical practices with new technology, making house calls to see his patients and then texting, e-mailing or IMing to follow up.

“The concept of motion pictures has existed since—I don’t know, 1900? I use the Internet to communicate efficiently and effectively with someone about their health,” said Parkinson, who noted that most doctors do not take advantage of technology as basic as e-mail.

One doctor in Las Vegas, Nev., has moved beyond e-mail to video e-mail. Dr. Loring Jacobs says it takes him less time to communicate with patients in a video e-mail than to write one.

“I got this technology about a year ago and immediately saw all kinds of potential,” said Jacobs, who says video e-mails are a huge time saver. “I can now send my patients their results by the next day. They can see my expression and they’re not getting results from a nurse. It makes a huge difference.”

Of course, not all health care videos are backed by credible sources. Video bloggers who want to offer testimonials and tell their stories are posting on YouTube and sites like icyou.com, a company in Charleston, S.C., that aims to be an aggregator of health care videos on the web. One man has posted a video on icyou.com titled “My Excellent Colonoscopy.”

Before the Internet, patients relied on pamphlets or videos produced by companies to get in depth medical information. The webcast from Beth Israel was not sponsored by any company, and it was real patients—not actors—who discussed chronic pain.

“All of the patients who helped put this video together did so voluntarily,” emphasized Sheu, who was able to maintain the integrity of Lamoureux’s tattoo when he implanted the neurostimulation device. “We wanted patients who had undergone spinal cord stimulation to tell their story.”

Dr. Thomas Sculco, chief of surgery at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York, filming a video on hip replacement surgery for Dramatic Health.

Courtesy of Dramatic Health

No Calories, Sweet And All Natural: Is Stevia Too Good To Be True?

By Richard Solash

Sprite Green is the latest addition to the world of Coca-Cola products, and its name refers not just to the color of the can or the beverage. This diet soda is green in a deeper sense, deriving its sweetness not from artificial saccharin or aspartame, but from a natural, zero-calorie sugar substitute that many experts believe is primed to take supermarket shelves by storm. It is called stevia, and since the Food and Drug Administration gave it its official blessing in December, some in the beverage industry have been hailing it as the Holy Grail of sweeteners.

“This could be huge,” said Daniel Fabricant, vice president of scientific and regulatory affairs at the Natural Products Association, an advocacy and lobbying group. “Stevia is the only non-calorie, natural sweetener that has been approved as a food additive, which means that it can now be used in all conventional food products.”

That could mean a much-needed boost for Coke

Now only available at select venues in New York City and Chicago, stevia-sweetened Sprite Green will have a broader rollout later this year.

Photo courtesy of Coca-Cola



and Pepsi, whose cola sales have been slumping. With obesity skyrocketing and a natural lifestyle more fashionable than ever, many consumers have shied away from sugary drinks in favor of more healthful refreshment. In response, the beverage giants have devoted more attention to their water and juice lines. But soda is still their flagship product, and using a sugar substitute that comes from a leaf and not from a lab—as do saccharin and aspartame—could be the key to revitalizing sales.

Along with its natural origins and null calorie count, stevia also has less of an aftertaste than its artificial counterparts, according to its fans. All together, that’s enough to make beverage executives excited, even as health concerns linger.

Coke is already using the sugar substitute (under the name Truvia) in two flavors of its Odwalla juice line and four flavors of Vitamin Water, along with Sprite Green.

Pepsi has introduced stevia (under the name PureVia) to its SoBe drinks and is soon to release a stevia-sweetened, reduced-calorie orange juice called Trop50. More stevia beverages are soon to follow. Food companies have also expressed interest, considering the sweetener for use in everything from oatmeal to gravy to gum.

Native to South America, the stevia plant is a bush that can grow from 9 inches to 4 feet tall.



How Well Can A Treadmill Count?

By Patrick Egan

You want to lose weight. You understand the basic principle: burn more energy, measured in calories, than you take in. It's math, pure and simple. The consumption numbers are easy to find — on food packaging, in nutrition books, even on some menus. Nailing down the calories you burn, though, is a more elusive task.

Fitness-equipment manufacturers understand your desires. They add tools to their gear that they say will help you reach your goals. But just because those calorie numbers are digital, bright red and flashing doesn't mean you should trust them. Some experts question whether tracking calories burned is even worthwhile.

The value of a calorie counter can be described much like a workout: The more you put in, the better it'll be. "The machines that ask for height, age, weight, gender. The more data points it will have, the truer readout of calories you'll get," says Gregory Florez, a spokesman for the nonprofit American College of Exercise and the chief executive of FitAdvisor.com.

But he estimates that even the best machines are likely to be 5 to 10 percent off for the average user. "It's a hard, dodgy number to pin down," says Florez. That's because exercise equipment can't read a person's lung capacity or tell how much a person sweats or know



what kind of fitness level he or she brings to the machine.

Some companies say their machines get close to accurate numbers. Life Fitness treadmills, cross-trainers and bicycles can be found in gyms and health clubs across the world. Bob Quast, vice president of branding, says the company has a team of scientists in a lab to build and calibrate the calorie counters on Life Fitness machines. With each new product, or signifi-

Rony Natan tracks his course and calories on a virtual reality recumbent bike in Manhattan.

Photo by Patrick Egan

cant overhaul of current equipment, the company will test 50 to 100 people of varying ages, heights, weights and fitness levels using V02 max. That's a cool name for a system that measures the maximal volume of oxygen a person can use when exercising at peak levels.

With all that information, Life Fitness programs its machines with proprietary algorithms. "It's a little bit of a secret sauce," says Quast. When a person steps on one of their machines and punches in personal information, the secret sauce spits out a calorie number.

Sometimes there doesn't appear to be much science to keep secret. Tony Little's Gazelle is a fitness product widely advertised on television. The top model comes with a calorie counter and heart rate monitor. A customer-service representative directed inquiries about the device to the manufacturer, FitnessQuest.

At FitnessQuest, customer-service supervisor Chris Hackney said the Gazelle's counter was calibrated for a 150-pound person. She said that more than one 150-pound person — without specifying how many more — used the Gazelle at an outside lab. Those tests created the readout numbers that Gazelle users see. Someone who is not 150 pounds has to adjust the calorie readout — more calories for heavier people, fewer for lighter. The owner's manual doesn't mention this adjustment or how to make it.

"Consumers really need to be careful about products they see on infomercials," says Henry Williford, a professor of exercise science at Auburn University, Montgomery, Ala. He chairs the consumer information committee for the American College of Sports Medicine. "If it's a piece of equipment where you don't sweat or do a lot of work, you're probably not getting benefit."

That's pretty close to the message some personal trainers are trying to communicate to their clients. Ideally, these trainers would like clients to worry less about specific numbers and focus on more simple things. "You're not doing enough and you're eating too much food," says Roy Taylor, a nationally certified personal train-

er in Tampa, Fla., describing the plight of most overweight people. The calorie counters, he says, "can be useful. But most people are barking up the wrong tree." The right tree, he said, is simply exercising hard, at least four or five times a week, so that a body feels it.

"Most beginners need the distraction" of a calorie counter, says David Cascia, who owns Elite Training and Fitness in Brooklyn, N.Y. "It engages them in the machine." But Cascia sees problems, too. "People get so in their heads about how much they burn." He says they then go out and eat what they think they burned. Cascia says that when people get in shape, they tend to eat better as a result. Regular exercisers are more attuned to what's going into their bodies.

"Calories are somewhat of an inexact science. They don't give you any indication of the quality of those calories," says Kristie Salzar, a nutritionist in Tampa, Fla. When she started in her profession 25 years ago, most nutritionists focused on the amount of calories their clients consumed, and Salzar simply didn't see results. She's telling her clients to move more — whether it's exercise or simply doing physical activities — and getting them to use intuition. "We're all born to know when we're hungry and when we're not," she says, pointing to a baby's crying as the simplest sign. But adults, she says, eat for many reasons, often psychological, that don't have anything to do with being hungry.

Kari Viste works out at the Downtown Brooklyn YMCA. While she doesn't consider herself a "calorie counter," she pays enough attention to know how many calories she burns on the elliptical machine. Identical 40-minute workouts allegedly burn 420 calories on the newer Life Fitness model but only 350 calories on the older machine. She hopes the newer model is more accurate.

"I don't think they're very reliable," says Viste of calorie counters. So why pay attention? She says it's "more of a game" that helps her reach her goals. But she doesn't use the number to rationalize what she should or should not eat. "I eat pizza no matter what."

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