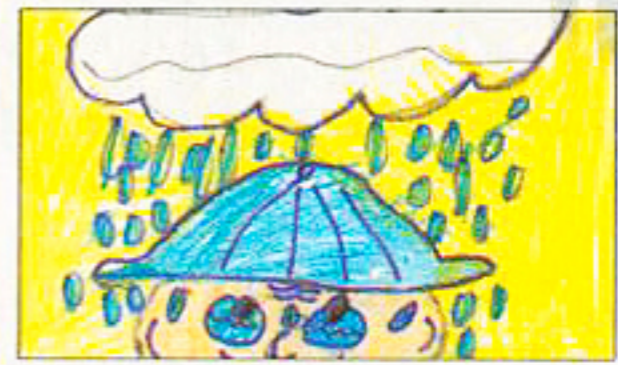


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Today's
weather
picture by:
Riley Moss, 9,
Camas, Helen
Baller
Elementary
School



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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2003



Robert Withee of Yacolt and his 1973 Pinto Runabout, which he's managed to keep on the road with plenty of wit and elbow grease.

DAVE OLSON/The Columbian

BEATEN, still, runnin'

Dogged car owners keep their aging vehicles running no matter what the odometer says

By BRETT OPPEGAARD
Columbian staff writer

As anyone serious about a vehicle tends to do, Robert Withee has purchased collector license plates for his car. As anyone not so earnest might, he also has a bumper sticker: "This Vehicle May Wreck or Explode for No Apparent Reason."

He has emphasized the volatile reputation of his 1973 Ford Pinto, as well, with a hand-painted warning on the back fin: "Caution Explosive."

Withee always has liked the idea of grabbing attention with his car, but he's never had the money or the interest in purchasing an expensive one.

So he's taken another approach, relying on wit and elbow grease to keep his vehicle on the road as well as to make a statement. His message, he says, is that people don't have to drive a BMW or a Mercedes to enjoy the pleasures of an automobile.

In fact, as many of the local auto-parts yards can attest, there is a distinct subculture of American society, where cars don't get traded

in every two years. Or five years. Or even 10 years or more. These cars are a lifelong commitment. Reasons vary: Just need something to get back and forth; rejecting the status of the symbol; want to save money; like doing the work; preserving a classic; honoring family heritage.

But the so-called "beater" — a car that's usually between 10 and 30 years old and beat up, hence the name — doesn't necessarily need a lot of background or justification. It's one of those lifestyle choices that's so underlyingly common it doesn't get much attention ... yet maybe it should in this nation of the most automobile-oriented humans in history.

Many folks sharing such an interest, including Withee with his Pinto, have used the Internet to connect. Withee chats regularly with more than 500 other Pinto owners throughout the nation on a message board hosted by Yahoo.com. There's also a Web site, www.beaterz.com, that includes photos of older cars under a title that says simply, "It still runs." Dozens of Clark County people,



TROY WAYRYNEN/The Columbian

Victor Cresap walks past the burned-out cab of a 1984 Dodge Ram pickup at his home in northwest Vancouver. "You should have seen the county guys' faces when I started it up," said Cresap.



DAVE OLSON/The Columbian

Wilma and Dave Nosko of Orchards and their 1977 Subaru, which has 348,000 miles on it. The only time he's washed it was two years ago, and just the passenger car door ... so Wilma wouldn't dirty her dress.

like Withee, recently shared their stories about their beaters, and touting their talents and abilities to keep these vehicles running with little expense while neighbors and friends pay hundreds of dollars a month in car payments and maintenance.

"There are several different kinds of people (who drive beaters)," said Todd Toedti, manager of All-American Classics in east

Vancouver. "Some people can't afford anything else. Some people drive a beater to work, so they don't have to worry about parking their new car in public places. Some people just have different priorities."

Jeremy Jondahl, manager of the Vancouver U-Pull-It, where many beater owners do their parts

WHEELS, page D6

They don't always look good, but they run

Here are a few stories from others in Clark County who have beaters:

■ **Hemant Bhana, Vancouver:** Bhana says the new radio he installed in his 1987 Toyota Corolla effectively doubled the car's value (and it wasn't an expensive radio). Of the many adventures he has had with this car during the past 180,000 miles, Bhana recalls driving back from southern Manitoba in a snowstorm with his wife and losing control of the vehicle, sliding into a snow bank. When they towed the car to a nearby shop, the engine compartment was so packed with snow that it took a couple of hours to defrost it with heaters. When the key finally was turned, the engine fired up immediately, and Bhana insists that the car ran smoother after the incident. "That was my sign not to purchase a new car until my beater's wheels fell off, the engine gave out or the body rusts," he said. "Well, it's still going."

■ **Vic Cresap, Vancouver:** County officials keep checking on Cresap's car collection, he acknowledges, because the 11 vehicles he keeps around his home look like they might be abandoned. But they aren't, he claims, and every one of them runs, except for a 1962 Thunderbird that he's in the process of restoring. A couple of weeks ago, for example, he received another visit from a county officer who didn't believe his claims. He asked Cresap to drive five of the vehicles around the 4.5-acre Vancouver property, including a Dodge that had been through a fire. Cresap said he really treasured the look of surprise on the officer's face when the Dodge started moving. "I just like working on cars and keeping them running," said Cresap, who has been retired since 1986.

■ **Freda and Joe Gipson, Ridgefield:** The first time the Gipsons' 1971 Ford pickup was totaled, they decided to rebuild it. The second time, they just put it back on the road. The green and white paint that is left is cracked or oxidized, Freda said, with the rest of the exterior covered with rust, the back fenders buckled. But mechanically, they haven't had to do any major repairs to the vehicle since the first accident, besides replacing a master cylinder. "People sometimes look at us funny

BEATERS, page D6

Take two downloads and call in the morning

DAVE BARRY



It's time once again for Keyboard Korner, the computer-advice column that uses simple, "jargon-free" terminology that even an idiot like you can grasp; the column that shows you how to "take command" of your personal computer, if necessary by reducing it to tiny smoking shards with a hatchet.

Today on Keyboard Korner we will address a very important topic: computer security. If you own a computer, or have touched a computer, or have ever shaken hands with some-

body who might have touched a computer, you need to take precautionary measures NOW. Because modern cyberspace is not the friendly, open, trusting, safe place it was back in February. Modern cyberspace is a deadly festering swamp, teeming with dangerous programs such as "viruses," "worms," "Trojan horses" and "licensed Microsoft software" that can take over your computer and render it useless.

This is exactly what happened last summer when the "SoBig" virus infected computers around the world, causing millions of

computer users to be completely cut off from the Internet during what turned out to be a critical phase in the relationship of Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck. Fortunately, most of these computer users were able to resume monitoring the situation by turning on their televisions. But precious minutes were lost.

If you want to prevent a similar tragedy from happening to you, you should immediately take the following steps to protect your computer:

1. Determine what version of operating system your computer

uses, and write this information on a piece of paper. If you don't know how to determine the version, just write down "Version 2.038."

2. Now write down the numbers and expiration dates of all your credit cards.

3. Now mail this information, along with your mother's maiden name, to
WARNING WARNING
DELETE DELETE

Whoa! That was a close one! A computer virus just attempted to take over the Keyboard Korner column WHILE YOU WERE

READING IT. That's how sophisticated these darned things have become!

And that's why it is so important that you take certain simple, basic steps to protect your computer. To determine what these steps are, Keyboard Korner called the Association of Technical Support Personnel Who Actually Understand Computers, where, after a brief wait, we were connected with a cheerful, knowledgeable and sympathetic recorded message informing us

BARRY, page D6



TROY WAYRYNEN/The Columbian

Mary Gill, who inherited a '74 Chevy Nova from her ailing grandmother, uses the car as her main transportation to and from classes at Clark College.

Beaters:

From page D1

when we're driving it," she said. "They seem to get out of our way, like this is a wreck ready to happen. It's ideal in traffic, really, because nobody will get close to you."

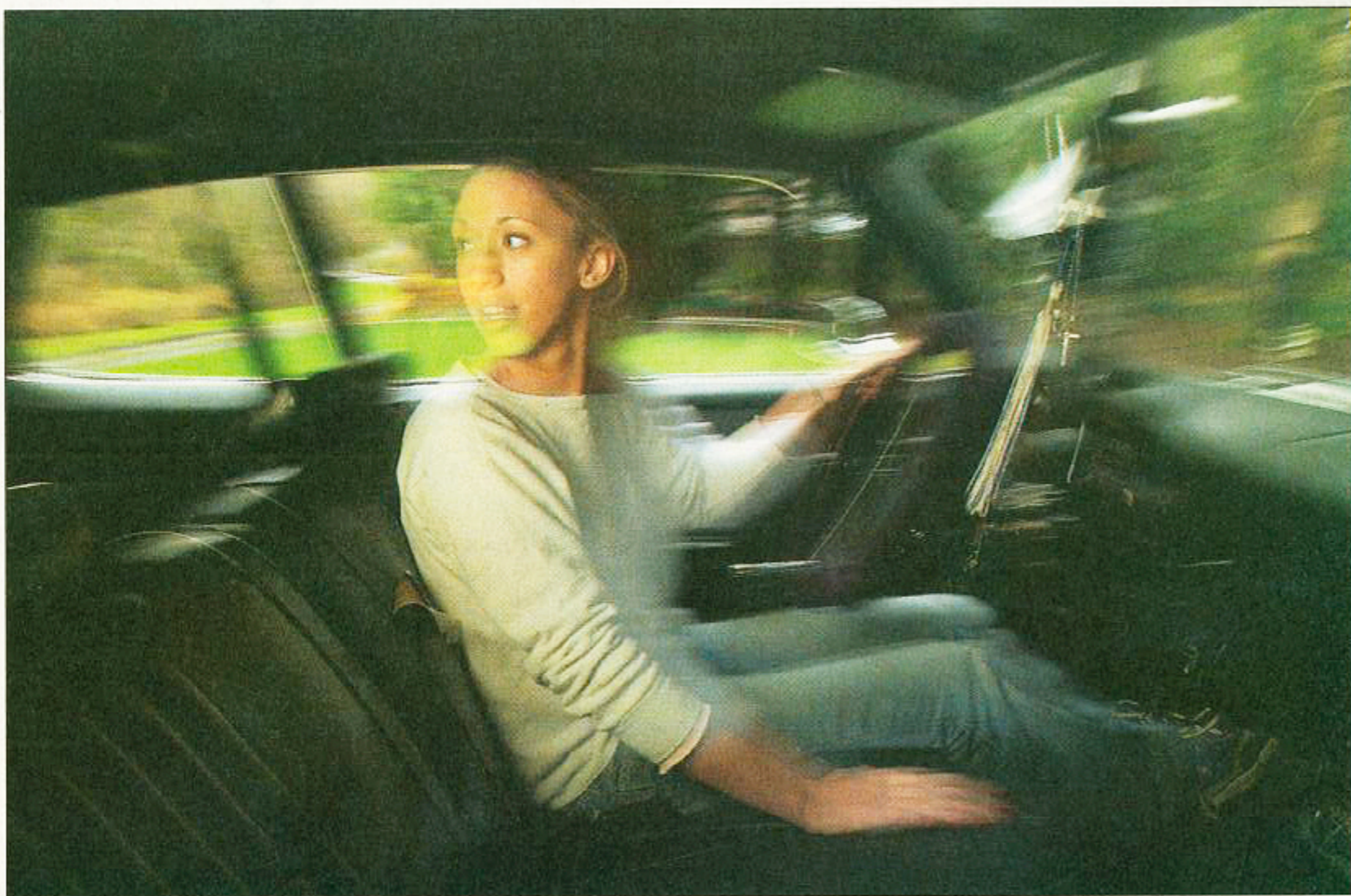
■ **Mary Gill, Vancouver:** Gill's 1974 Nova has chips in its white exterior that show the previous blue and green paint jobs like a partially eaten candy jawbreaker. Its vinyl seats are ripped so much that Gill covers the back bench with a purple Mexican blanket while the driver's seat consists mainly of springs and discolored foam. It stutters for a social eternity when shut down, and it takes 10 minutes to warm up each time it's started in the winter. "Every once in a while, I'll get pissed off at it, when the heat doesn't come on right away, or the air conditioning won't work or the washer fluid won't come out," Gill said. "But I never even think about selling it."

■ **Elwin Howard, Vancouver:**

Howard said he's old enough to relate to the Great Depression; when the cardboard over the hole in his shoe wore out, he'd get another piece of cardboard. In 1973, he bought a Toyota and has only needed to put in a new clutch, water pump and alternator over its 30 years. But he's most proud of the lifetime battery he bought for the car in 1974 (good only for the original owner). He's been able to get seven new batteries out of the deal.

■ **Doug Moore, Vancouver:** To save money (or because he couldn't afford a place to live), Moore has ended up living in his 1987 Toyota minivan for weeks at a time in Seattle, Texas and California. He paid \$2,000 for it in 1994 and has close to 300,000 miles on it, doing all of the maintenance and repairs himself. The 41-year-old said the vehicle has repaid him many times over in lodging, although he's spending time now in his mother's Vancouver home while he studies facilities maintenance at Portland Community College. He uses the minivan to get to classes.

■ **Wilma and David Nosko,**



TROY WAYRYNEN/The Columbian

The driver's seat of Gill's Nova is more springs and foam than vinyl covering. The car's back bench seat is ripped up, too, so a purple Mexican blanket hides the holes.

■ **Sifton:** More than 300,000 miles have been put on the Noskos' 1977 Subaru, including all-terrain trips into the woods of Mount Adams in search of wild mushrooms. They gave up on cleaning the car many years ago, although David washed the door and frame on Wilma's side of the vehicle as a Mother's Day gift in 2001, so she wouldn't get her dress dirty when they went out to celebrate. "It's a ratty-looking car," Wilma said. "But you

wouldn't believe all of the places we've been able to go with that thing (and their portable winch). (David) still drives it every day."

■ **Arthur Stuart, Vancouver:** Stuart was looking for a new car in the spring of 1975, when he came across an Oldsmobile Cutlass that came with a swivel seat, a fact stressed by the salesman. Stuart was impressed with the feature and decided to give it a try. He and his wife of 55 years, Miriam,

have been swiveling in and out of that car ever since, putting about 300,000 miles on the vehicle. He doesn't even like to get in other cars, he said, because of the problems the 84-year-old finds in the more recent designs. "Just looking at those newer cars, that's a sardine can with wheels under it ... in my opinion."

■ **Gloria Hanson Woodley, Vancouver:** Woodley bought her 1965 AMC Rambler from a neighbor in 1970.

The 80-year-old prefers walking or mass transportation, including commuting to Portland by bus during her working days, so she hasn't driven it much over the years (only 125,000 miles on the odometer). The car's been dependable. It still looks pretty good and runs perfectly, she said, adding with a laugh that she lives a cliché. "You've heard about the little old lady in the Rambler," she said. "Well, here I am."

Wheels:

From page D1

searching, said, "People spend a lot of time in their cars, and they definitely get attached to their vehicles. ... Because of that attachment, some are willing to hold onto them for a long time, and in a lot of cases, they are willing to do what it takes to keep them

running." Jondahl, for example, daily drives the 1972 pickup that his grandfather bought new and eventually passed down to him. "Sometimes," he added, "the reasons are simply sentimental."

Withee says he has many motives for holding on to his brownish-gold Pinto, ranging from the memories of driving a similar station wagon while attending Prairie High School

in the late 1980s to the idea that he was able to save \$20,000 for college and other important investments through his penchant for low-budget beaters.

"(The status part of it) never bothered me," Withee said. "Growing up, my parents had a 1970 station wagon that they kept until 1988. ... I just realized that if I ever wanted to get ahead in life, then I needed to focus on things that ap-

preciate in value, not depreciate."

The Pinto has been easy for Withee to fix, and insurance is cheap. He eventually bought a second one for parts, and he still keeps the Ford compact in good running condition. He does, however, use another car for his daily ride: a Plymouth Caravelle that was given to him (\$300 street value) more than 10,000 miles ago. And counting.



DAVE OLSON/The Columbian

A decal on the rear of Robert Withee's 1973 Pinto Runabout gives warns to the motoring public.

Santa's Mailbag helpers kept hopping in North Pole

By MARY BETH SMETZER
Fairbanks Daily News-Miner

NORTH POLE, Alaska — Santa's Mailbag is bursting at the seams as wave after wave of letters to the jolly old elf roll in.

The North Pole postman doesn't just drop off the letters at Santa's Mailbag, he hauls it by the truckload, backing up to the front door of Santa's Pull Tabs in Beaver Brook Mall and delivering it in neatly stacked trays of 500 letters each.

"Just today we received 8,000 letters," said Gabby Gaborik, who oversees dozens of volunteers who respond to the

letters sent to North Pole, Alaska.

Gaborik is manager of Santa's Pull Tabs, which is operated by the Northern Lights Badger Lions Club.

As of Tuesday afternoon, volunteers had answered or were in the process of answering 20,000 letters to children across the United States and around the world. That's quadruple the number of responses sent out last year, said Gaborik, who buys Christmas stamps in boxes of 50 rolls each.

A newspaper ad this season recruited three times the number of volunteers compared

with last year and help is still needed. There is yet another week to answer letters and meet the final postal deadline of Dec. 17, Gaborik said.

Many of the letters received are cryptically addressed, such as "Santa, North Pole." Many arrive unstamped but decorated with colorful stickers or a child's hand-drawn stamp in the upper right-hand corner.

Despite the lack of official postage, the post office delivers them and Santa's Mailbag takes them all. Pull-tab employee Sheila Holcomb often sits at the counter during slow times and works on a tray of letters. She reads each letter and selects one of three printed response letters from Santa Claus to mail back to the sender — if there is a return address — as well as a 12-stanza poem titled "Christmas Eve at the North Pole," written by Gaborik.

Holcomb sometimes will take a tray of 500 letters home

at night and work on them with her three oldest children, ages 17, 15 and 13.

"I have a 10-year-old and 6-year-old who still believe (in Santa Claus), so I don't let them help," she said.

Asking for help

Tuesday afternoon, Holcomb pulled out a letter from a 12-year-old girl named Elizabeth who wrote that she was writing for the third year and hadn't received any presents yet. She listed the names and ages of her three younger brothers and herself, complete with their clothing and shoe sizes and requests for items like blue jeans and T-shirts.

She closed the letter asking for something for her Mom and Dad and maybe a CD player.

Gaborik said his ears are sore from calling long distance, checking out many similar letters to make this Christmas special for some needy children around the country.

"If there is a family in dire need, we try to verify the letter is legitimate and contact service groups in the area to find out. We don't ask the service groups to do anything," Gaborik said, but often they do.

He is assisted by Mavis Yenne who has been involved with the Lions' effort since it started and who contacts all Lions groups by fax or letter around the country.

Last year, he said, one of the Mailbag's volunteers spotted a letter from a needy family and The Salvation Army in Cincinnati responded to help a woman who had been injured in a car accident, had no nearby family and no way to make Christmas for her children.

"Some of the letters are real cute, some are tear-jerkers and some are real funny," Gaborik said.

Another precaution Santa's Mailbag takes is to burn all the letters so they don't get into the wrong hands. That is done after all the stamps on the let-

ters are cut out and donated to the Veterans Administration to be used in rehabilitation projects or therapy.

The most unusual letter Santa's Mailbag has received to date was written on a bar coaster/postcard, requesting a few redheaded women of loose morals. It went unanswered.

Gaborik's favorite letter this year came from an anonymous woman in Baton Rouge, La., who said she has written to Santa for the past 37 years. It read like a combination thank you letter and prayer. She asked for a few favors, like a little tolerance with her grumpy moods, good health for her mother, etc.

People in North Pole and the surrounding area have been voluntarily answering letters to Santa Claus, complete with a North Pole, Alaska, postal cancellation since 1954, the year after the City of North Pole was incorporated, Gaborik said.

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Barry:

From page D1

that we would be kept on hold until the sun was a cold dark cinder the size of a walnut.

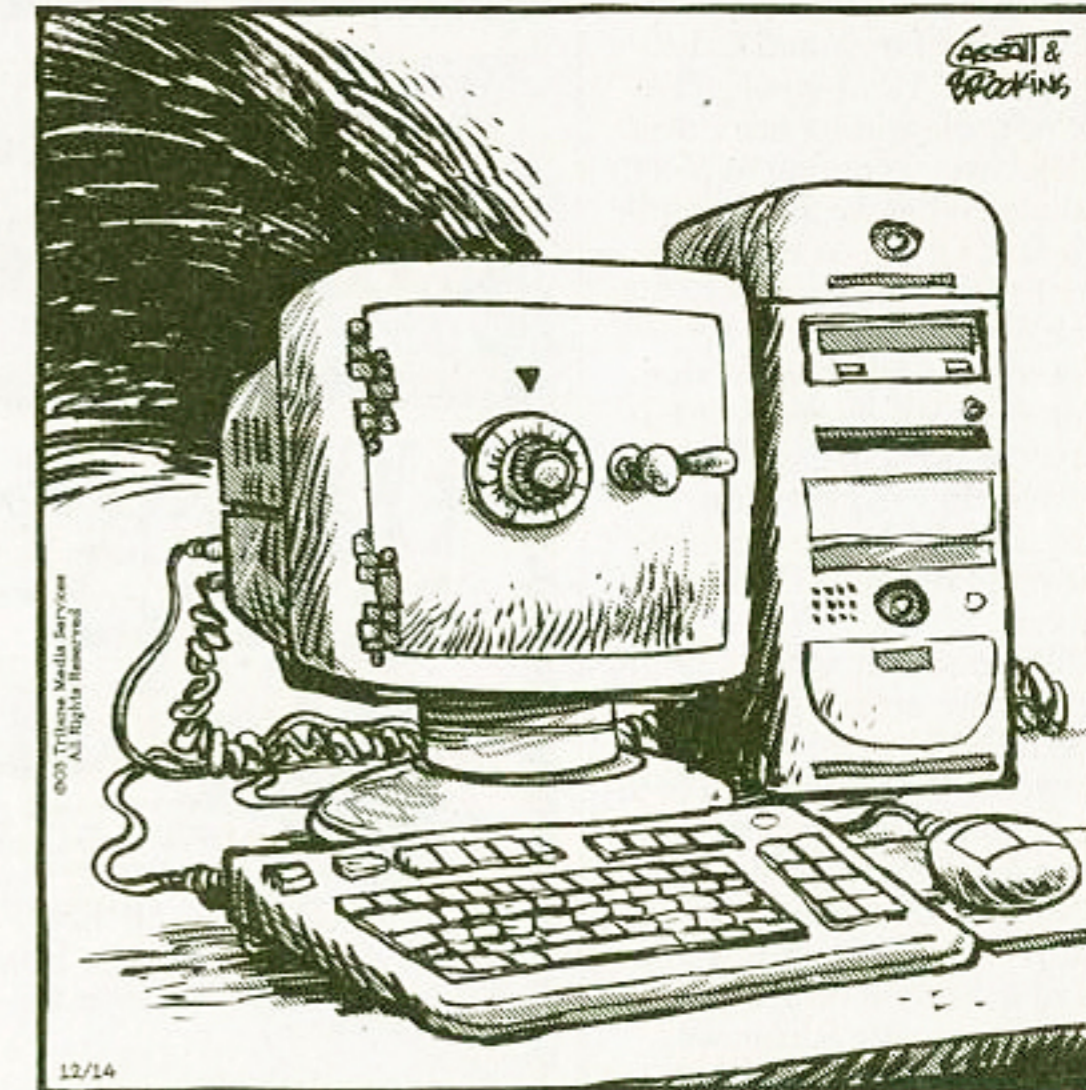
So we decided to do our own research into computer security, and here's what we learned: There is a Nigerian businessman, Mr. John Ombmbwble, who has come into possession of \$285 million in cash, and he needs to give 35 percent of it to somebody, and out of all the people on the planet earth, he has chosen Keyboard Korner! All we had to do is send him some banking information and samples of our signature! So pretty soon we will be on "Easy Street" and won't have to write this stupid computer advice column for you losers, so ha ha ha!

But in the meantime, here are some simple, basic steps that you can take to make your computer secure:

1. GET RID OF TEENAGERS — Teenagers are a major cause of computer trouble, because they think they're so smart, and they're

always messing with things and changing things and installing things and swapping songs and downloading disgusting porno filth that they refuse to share with their parents. To prevent this from happening to you, get a good anti-teenager program such as Teen-B-Gone, which causes the computer, when booted up, to play, at full volume, a video of Mr. Barry Manilow singing his rousing hit number "Copacabana." (NOTE: Teen-B-Gone is a complex program; to install and configure it properly, you will need the help of a teenager.)

2. CHECK FOR INCOMING ELECTRICITY — One factor common to many computer viruses is that, in order to function, they require electricity. Get down on your hands and knees and crawl under your desk; do you see a wire going from the computer to the wall? If so, chances are that — unbeknownst to you — this wire is bringing electricity directly into your house from a massive "power grid" that is also connected to prisons, crack houses, municipal sewage



facilities, porno filth stores, etc. Yank it out. (The wire, we mean.) Then curl into a fetal position and REMAIN UNDER THE DESK, because there are new computer viruses out there now that can travel through the air and bypass your computer entirely and en-

ter your brain via your dental fillings. Keyboard Korner can feel it happening right now.

DAVE BARRY is a humor columnist for the Miami Herald. Write to him c/o The Miami Herald, One Herald Plaza, Miami FL 33132.