

The Columbian Life

Section D

Today's weather picture by Josh Silves, 9, Ridgefield, Union Ridge Elementary School



SUNDAY, JUNE 22, 2008



JOEL STEIN

With wine, just sip it and zip it

When wine drinkers tell me they taste notes of cherries, tobacco and rose petals, usually all I can detect is a whole lot of jackass. The language of sommeliers, winemakers, sellers and writers has devolved into nothing besides a long list of obscure smells that tells me nothing. I get a lot of cherry and cassis from Manischewitz, too, but it would help a lot more if you told me it was cough-syrup-goopy sugar-water.

I miss the days when we made fun of wine snobs for saying that a wine was "ingratiating without being obsequious." Now wine snobs are too boring to make fun of. Ever since professor Ann Noble of the University of California, Davis, created the Wine Aroma Wheel more than 20 years ago, people have become obsessed with seeing how many memories they can inhale out of a glass.

In 1988, "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" author Roald Dahl, who apparently drank exactly as much as you would have guessed the creator of Willie Wonka would drink, wrote a letter to *Decanter* magazine in which he said that wine "tastes primarily of wine — grape-juice, tannin and so on. If I am wrong about this, and the great wine writers are right, then there is only one conclusion. The chateaux in Bordeaux have begun to lace their grape juice with all manner of other exotic fruit juices, as well as slinging in a bale or two of straw and a few packets of ginger biscuits for extra flavouring." I like to imagine what Shel Silverstein wrote in the following week.

Admittedly, part of my problem is that I have a weak sense of smell. But it's also

STEIN, Page D7

To our readers,

Today the Life section is introducing columnist Joel Stein.

Stein began writing a column for the Los Angeles Times in 2005. His work has appeared in the New Yorker, Entertainment Weekly and Time magazine.

"Basically, what I do is the opposite of 'Seinfeld': I turn something into nothing. To get that perspective, I try to find the small angle on the story no one has looked at," Stein says of his column.

Stein replaces Dave Barry's humor column in the Sunday Life section.

Barry was such an important fixture on features pages that *The Columbian*, along with many other newspapers, opted to rerun his best work when Barry took an indefinite hiatus from writing his weekly column in 2005.

But after several years of Barry reruns, *The Columbian* has decided it's time for a new voice.

We believe you'll enjoy Joel Stein's take on the world just as much as Dave Barry's.

A howling good time

Lodge's new \$100 million water park is great for minivacation with kids



Unlike the Interstate 5 view, the front entrance of Great Wolf Lodge better reflects its \$100 million price tag.



This bucket at the top of a 48-foot-tall tower dumps thousands of gallons of water every few minutes at Great Wolf Lodge's indoor water park. Photos courtesy of Great Wolf Lodge



By BRETT OPPEGAARD for *The Columbian*

It's always 84 degrees. The water is warm, and the 56,000 square feet of splashy amenities packs the wallop of a tidal wave.

The new water park inside the Great Wolf Lodge in Grand Mound, south of Olympia, gives Northwest families a destination resort within driving distance that's designed for short vacations with kids.

The view of the \$100 million lodge isn't impressive when spotted from Interstate 5 near the Tenino exit. It looks like a big building, of course, only with a strange giant funnel attached to the back. But when visitors reach the front entrance, the magnificence of the 39-acre complex comes into focus. Huge wolf sculptures adorn the

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More travel news and features.

heavily timbered architecture, which is reminiscent of the rustic feel of Skamania Lodge in Stevenson. Maybe a better comparison, though, is the Heathman Lodge near the Vancouver mall — another surprisingly woodsy structure surrounded by a drab suburban landscape.

The adjacent mishmash of commercial development disappears upon entry. Great Wolf's nature theme thoroughly changes that mood. Animatronic animals, sound effects that include howl-

LODGE, Page D7

If you go

What: Great Wolf Lodge, a new \$100 million water park featuring a variety of attractions such as the six-story-tall Howlin' Tornado funnel ride and a four-story water fort.

Where: Grand Mound, about 90 miles north of Vancouver and 10 miles south of Olympia.

Cost: The water park is reserved for hotel guests, with rooms costing from \$179 to \$569 per night, which includes the price of admission to the park.

Information: 800-640-9653 (640-WOLF) or greatwolf.com/locations/Grandmound.

Celebs feel pain of bankruptcy, too

Money mismanagement and job loss have left many stars scrambling

By JOHN HORN and NICOLE LOOMIS
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — They live in mansions. Shop at the fanciest department stores. Or drive luxury cars. So why is it that so many highly paid entertainers have money issues?

Well, they often live in mansions, shop in the fanciest department stores or drive luxury cars — even when they can no longer afford it.

Although an exact accounting of Ed McMahon's financial problems remains undisclosed, he risks foreclosure on his multimillion-dollar Beverly Hills estate, and he and his company owe American Express Co. nearly \$750,000. But the veteran entertainer recently said he understood this basic economic principle: When you spend more than you make,

you've got problems.

Fame may open lots of doors, but it can't always pay the bills, especially when those tabs run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars and work suddenly slows down or stops altogether. And even though Hollywood celebrities can seem worldly in ways beyond regular folks, they are often surprisingly naive in managing their own financial affairs, lawyers and business managers say.

McMahon, the 85-year-old former sidekick to Johnny Carson on "The Tonight Show" and host of "Star Search," made headlines recently for facing foreclosure on his Mediterranean-style mansion, but that's not his only financial crisis.

On April 16, American Express won an arbitration judgment against him and his company, McMahon Communications Inc., for \$747,000



Ed McMahon
Neck injury kept him from working



Lorraine Bracco
"Sopranos" star filed in 1999

over unspecified debts, according to Los Angeles Superior Court documents. A lawyer from American Express declined to comment about the dispute.

According to the Wall Street Journal, McMahon — who has hosted real estate infomercials — has been trying to sell the property for two years; two Web sites listed the asking price at \$5.75 million, but listing agent Alex Davis said it was priced at \$6.25 million.

McMahon, who declined to be interviewed, said on CNN's "Larry King Live" Thursday, "If you spend more than you make, you know what

BROKE, Page D7

CELEBRITY BANKRUPTCY FILINGS

Ed McMahon

Filing date: March 2008 (for default notice); April 2008 (for arbitration award)

Debts: More than \$600,000 behind on payments on his \$4.8 million mortgage of his \$6.25 million house; \$747,000 due in an arbitration award and judgment to American Express

Marion "Suge" Knight

Filing date: May 2006

Assets: \$4.4 million

Debts: \$137 million

Lorenzo Lamas

Filing date: May 2004

Assets: \$433,000

Debts: \$617,000

Randy Quaid

Filing date: January 2000

Assets: \$3.4 million

Debts: \$3.5 million

Lorraine Bracco

Filing date: June 1999

Assets: \$2.2 million

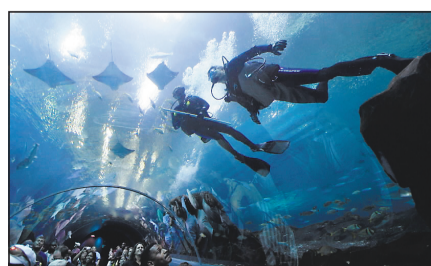
Debts: \$2.4 million

Source: Petition filed in United States Bankruptcy Court

your Guide:



Jane Goodall leaves her animals to try to save the planet /D3



Travel: At Georgia aquarium, guests swim with whale sharks /D4

Books: Author restores human side to Gandhi, Churchill /D8

Coldplay gets warmer with "Viva" /D9

Coming Monday:

Gas tips that work and those that don't /D1

Lodge:

From Page D1

ing wolves and other gizmos engage guests as they tour the amenities. The massive water park can be seen in the background, but it's the lobby area that shifts the tone with its high ceiling and huge fireplace, as well as large couches and tables that encourage lounging and board games.

The lodge is a partnership between the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation and Great Wolf Resorts, based in Madison, Wis., the largest developer of indoor water parks in the country.

John Poole, director of sales and marketing for the Grand Mound facility, said the recently opened Washington lodge is the 10th in the chain, with the 11th already under construction in North Carolina.

While regular hotel business is growing at about 3 percent per year, he said, destination family resorts garnered five times that growth in recent years. For the Chehalis tribe, Poole said, it's a way to earn money outside of casinos.

Aleatha Ezra, director of park member development for the World Waterpark Associa-



Photos courtesy of Great Wolf Lodge

Great Wolf Lodge's water park features children's play areas, a wave pool and slides.

tion, said that indoor facilities have become more popular now than outdoor, and that about 200 indoor water parks are in the works throughout the country. About 100 of those are expected to be completed within the next two years, including combinations with cruise ships, ski resorts

and campgrounds. To put that into context, the United States has about 180 indoor water parks right now.

People are increasingly busy and more likely to be able to fit in a two- or three-day vacation than a full week or two, Poole said. The sputtering economy meanwhile is causing more

folks to consider options within driving distance. An indoor water park with private rooms eliminates concerns about inclement weather and sunburns while providing a base camp for the family.

Admission to the water park comes with the room rental, which ranges from \$179 to

\$569 a night. All of those 398 rooms are suites and include a refrigerator. (Bringing outside food and drink is fine.) About a third of the rooms have expanded themes that include such details as bunk-bed dens for kids.

Some in the surrounding community have complained about the unavailability of day rates, but Poole said that's a critical component to how his company maintains the park's value.

"Our guests own the water park," he said. "That way there are not big crowds and long lines, and people can use the rides as much as they want."

The rest of the lodge — including five restaurants, a Starbucks, spas, 30,000 square feet of conference space, an arcade and various other activity rooms for children — is open to the general public.

A day trip to the Northwest's other major water attraction, Wild Waves Theme Park in Federal Way, costs \$35 per person for those over 48 inches tall and \$30 per child otherwise. Two adults and two small children, for example, would pay \$130.

That park is bigger — 60 acres — and offers a wider variety of rides, including such non-water amusements

as roller coasters. It also attracts throngs of people from throughout the Seattle area, said John Hays, director of marketing. It often fills its 20,000 capacity on sunny summer days.

Poole said Great Wolf Lodge keeps occupancy at its water park to about 1,000 people, which emphasizes the exclusivity of the attraction.

While Wild Waves caters more to older children looking for intense thrills, Great Wolf is designed with clear appeal to a younger crowd. It has a large pool area for toddlers, plus a four-story water fort and a wave pool. All of the rides are tame enough for elementary-age kids, except perhaps the Howlin' Tornado, that funny-looking funnel on the back of the building. It's a six-story-tall slide that plunges a four-person raft into the funnel, swirling it around, up and down the sides, before spitting it out the opening.

My kindergartner was not tall enough for that ride, but she thoroughly enjoyed the rest of the park as well as the arcade, The Loose Moose Cottage buffet and the craft rooms. She said she liked the experience almost as much as our recent trip to Disneyland, the gold standard in our family.

Broke:

From Page D1

happens."

McMahon injured his neck in a fall a year and a half ago, which has prevented him from working and earning money to pay his bills, according to his publicist, Howard Bragman. "Ed loves to work," he said. "I don't think he would know what to do if he retired."

Bragman added that McMahon's financial problems stemmed in part from his munificence. "Ed supports a lot of people and charities — he's been exquisitely generous to everybody. He's just a giving guy."

Whatever is causing McMahon to fall behind on his bills, he's hardly alone in Hollywood.

While millions of working-class people struggle, several highly paid celebrities — including actor Randy Quaid and rap music impresario Marion "Suge" Knight — have suffered their own financial difficulties.

Living the good life

Unlike homeowners wrestling with adjustable-rate mortgages, the entertainers are sometimes undone by the true costs of a rich-and-famous lifestyle.

"Renegade" television actor Lorenzo Lamas owed nearly \$200,000 on a private plane, while actress Lorraine Bracco, who later became famous on "The Sopranos," was on the hook for more than \$7,000 to Giorgio Armani and more than \$4,000 to a limousine service, their bankruptcy petitions show.

"I don't think it's unique at all," attorney Jay Cooper, who is chairman of the West Coast entertainment practice of Greenberg Traurig, said of McMahon's difficulties. "Every single career in the business has its ups and downs. And unless you are prepared for the valleys, you're going to be in trouble."

When the work is coming, so are the perks, which may be part of the reason many celebrities have a hard time understanding the actual costs of their high standard of living. While they are employed, most top stars can go for weeks without having

to pay for much more than breath mints. Movie studios cover their hotel, food and transportation bills; designers shower them with free clothes; and gift baskets come jammed with complimentary cell phones, jewelry and other goodies.

That swank standard of living soon becomes addictive — even after some third party has stopped underwriting it. And Hollywood can be as cruel as it is kind with compensation, and the once-hot actress who was making \$10 million a few years ago might be forced to scrape by with just \$5 million now. If her cost of living has grown to match those better-off days, she might suddenly find herself millions in the hole.

For all the media attention focused on fat show-business paydays, news stories often fail to spell out the true financial accounting that's central to entertainer compensation.

Almost every performer retains a talent agent, whose fees average 10 percent of the gross returns, and many also use a personal manager, who typically takes 15 percent more. A business manager will charge an additional 5 percent, and attorneys can add the same fee. Then there's the publicist, who can cost as much as \$5,000 a month. So a hypothetical \$100,000 acting job would net about \$60,000, and state and federal taxes would trim that amount even more.

That one acting gig still delivers more than most Americans earn in a year, but most Americans don't have the kind of mortgage that McMahon carries.

Built in 1989, his estate inside a gated community has six bedrooms and five baths. The master suite includes his-and-her baths. The home features canyon views, imported doors and, according to a real estate listing, "meticulously

chosen fireplaces."

When Columbus, Ohio, bankruptcy attorney Susan Rhiel heard of McMahon's cash-flow issues, she was reminded of the plight faced by some of her high-net-worth clients.

"They may be very good in what they do in their field, but they may be very poor money managers," Rhiel said. "And they feel that because of their status they have this entitlement — 'I should be able to go to the spa every week, even if I can't afford it anymore.'"

A few years after his television show "The Immortal" was canceled, Lamas filed for bankruptcy protection in 2004, listing assets of \$433,000 and debts of \$617,000. He owed more than \$20,000 on a Harley-Davidson motorcycle, \$48,000 on a Hummer H2 and nearly \$200,000 on a Piper Seneca airplane. He listed his monthly take-home income at \$10,922 but his monthly costs at \$21,826, which included \$6,123 in alimony. Lamas' bankruptcy case was closed in 2005.

Bracco, in her 1999 bankruptcy filing (before "The Sopranos" became a hit), claimed assets of \$2.2 million (including \$97,000 in fine art and \$66,000 in jewelry) but debts of \$2.4 million. Her bankruptcy case was closed in 2004. Her bankruptcy lawyer did not return a call seeking comment.

In his 2000 bankruptcy filing, Quaid and his wife, Evi, listed assets of \$3.4 million but debts of \$3.5 million, including a bill from Barneys New York for \$11,554.

The Quaid bankruptcy, which the couple said was prompted by a court battle over the financing of "The Debtors," a 1999 movie that Evi Quaid directed and Randy Quaid starred in, was closed in 2005. A message left with their bankruptcy lawyer was not returned.

Stein:

From Page D1

that something I enjoy has been reduced to a game of faux scientific analysis. Gary Vaynerchuk, my favorite wine reviewer and the author of "101 Wines Guaranteed to Inspire, Delight, and Bring Thunder to Your World," includes tasting notes — he ate his own sweaty sock on "Late Night With Conan O'Brien" to train his palate — but mostly he discusses wine more holistically. "I speak about wines like they're people," he says.

"How heavy is it and is it bitter and does it have a personality? Does this wine have chaos? I referred to wine as the movie 'Platoon': awesome beginning; terrible finish. I think it embarks different senses than if I said it was leather with a little bit of cranberry."

Personally, I want to know if a wine is rough, balanced, acidic, sweet, simple, tannic, soft, hot with alcohol, minerally, watery or has a long finish. I want to know that a Zinfandel, our greatest native grape, tastes like America: big, bold, unsubtle and ready to fight.

Vaynerchuk referred to one

big American Pinot Noir as a "Roger Clemens" because it's overly pumped up. My wife's brother, Ian Barry, a winemaker in upstate New York, similarly once described a California Sea Smoke as a "female bodybuilder — something that's supposed to be delicate and elegant, but has been enhanced in ways that aren't really attractive to most of us. When I drink wines like that, I picture guys in gold jewelry and slicked-back hair bragging about how expensive it is." I e-mailed him back that I knew exactly what that wine was like thanks to him — and carefully avoided any mention of the fact that I'm on Sea Smoke Cellars' allocation list or that, as a teenager, I occasionally watched female bodybuilders on ESPN2.

"The reason there's a problem is that there's a lot of people who suck at communicating," Vaynerchuk says. "And it's lack of self-esteem and pretension. Nobody has guts. Jancis Robinson and Wine Spectator and Robert Parker write that way, so everyone else does. It's classic sheep mentality."

And it's not just wine — or chocolate, tea, coffee and olive oil — where the language

is exactly the same. Movie critics, book reviewers and television writers have all become 6-year-olds telling me everything that happened on an episode of "SpongeBob" — wasting paragraph after paragraph impersonally recounting plot, as if my sole goal as a reader is to glean just enough to get into arguments at wine-tasting parties.

So from now on, wine drinkers, you get to mention three things you smell in a wine, max. Then you have to tell me something more interesting. If that seems too hard, I suggest drinking more wine until it isn't.

JOEL STEIN is a columnist for the Los Angeles Times. His e-mail is jstein@latimescolumnists.com.

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