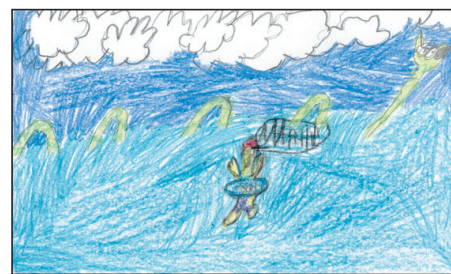


The Columbian
Life

Section D

Today's weather picture by Kelsey Gardner, 10, Battle Ground, Captain Strong Elementary School



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2006

Give an elf to someone you love ... or hate

Web site lets visitors download jolly folk for use in 'e-cards'

By COLLEEN LONG
Associated Press writer

NEW YORK — The folks at Office Max want you to elf yourself. Or elf someone one you love. Elf someone you can't stand. Whatever.

The office supply company has launched a holiday campaign on its Web site where bored workers whiling the day away in their cubicles can go to create all sorts of obnoxious holiday cheer.

"Elf Yourself" is among 20 different Web sites created by the advertising firm Toy New York. They are located on a landing page fit snugly in the "Christmas and holiday gift guide" section of the Office Max site.

"It's a tough assignment," Toy founder and creative director Ari Merkin said of the holiday campaign. "Especially when you have to shout over all the holiday clutter. People don't usually go shopping for gifts at an office supply store."

But people are going to the holiday sites in droves.

Elfyourself.com is getting more than 200 hits a second, Merkin said, and eight new elves are created per second. Tech folks had to upgrade the server three times in the past week. Bloggers can't stop talking about it, and it appeared on VH-1's "Best Week Ever" site last week and it was plugged on ABC's "Good Morning America."

At Elfyourself, you create a wacky e-card for someone by downloading a picture, of which the face gets superimposed on a computer generated elf that resembles a "South Park" character. Enter in some text or record a saying and voila. It does a funny dance to your holiday ode.

The process is sort of lengthy and sort of annoying, and the site breaks down every so often. But if you have a few minutes in your workday, it's not a bad way to pass the time.

Other sites that Toy created for the campaign include reindeer arm-wrestling and "Save the Snowman," where you play hangman against a melting snowman.

Merkin said his creative team worked around the clock from about September to get the job done.

"E-cards around the holidays are pretty lame and so we thought we'd start there," he said.

Whether or not it's actually serving its purpose, to help Office Max sell more, isn't known yet. The company will be releasing sales results at the end of the quarter.

Working at Vancouver mall, Jenny Multer coaches, coaxes and clicks clients

PORTRAIT
of a
photographer



Photos by DAVID PLECHL for The Columbian
Jenny Multer is the lead photographer at Flash Digital Portraits in the Vancouver mall, but she dreams of opening her own studio.

Vancouver mall has four portrait studios, where hundreds of children are being brought this time of year for holiday pictures.

By BRETT OPPEGAARD
Columbian staff writer

The kids are wearing uncomfortable clothes. The parents desperately want a holiday picture. It's Jenny Multer's job to get the shot. She has 30 minutes to do it.

The lead photographer at Flash Digital Portraits arrives as Vancouver mall opens. She hangs her winter coat and walks straight to the storefront's glass-encased studio. Shoppers already are whizzing by, and peeking in, as ubiquitous Christmas music plays.

This is the portrait photographers' busiest time of year, and Multer can tell that her first clients of the day are going to be a challenge. The family of four, including a 6-year-old boy and 2-year-old girl, appears anxious to begin.

The parents tell Multer that they want a photo of the two kids, who are wearing pressed and matching outfits. The little girl, Lilli, defiantly announces that she won't be having her picture taken. The mother, Electra Kirkley, slips a piece of candy in her mouth.

Multer slides off her shoes, gets on her hands and knees, and starts crawl-

ing around the studio floor, trying to get the kids in position on a bench while keeping them entertained. Multer rings a bell. She raises the pitch of her voice to Betty Boop-ish level. She laughs. She trills. Lilli sits still for a single shot, then hops up. Her mother gives her more candy. She sits again. Another flash. Lilli is up.

"Let's go home and go to bed," her father, Ian Kirkley, says in frustration. It's just a few minutes after 9 a.m.

Multer is one of only about 130,000

PHOTOGRAPHER, Page D4

At Flash Digital Portraits, photos are shot, downloaded, edited and printed for customers within hours on-site.



Did you know?

■ The median annual salary for a photographer is \$26,000, according to the U.S. Labor Department.

GIFT IDEAS FOR CHRISTMAS: DAY 8

For the outdoors enthusiast on your list:

Gretchen Schwinn is president of the local Ptarmigans outdoor club, www.ptarmigans.org, which focuses on mountaineering and rock climbing. The 25-year-old says she wears her Marmot soft-shell jacket just about everywhere and highly recommends it as a gift idea.

Schwinn worked as a climbing ranger for a summer on Mount St. Helens, reaching the summit about 30 times. She had to wear a cotton blend coat as a ranger. Earlier this month, she went back up the mountain with her new jacket, commenting, "I was actually dry when I finished."

She calls the Marmot coat a perfect all-weather shell, water-resistant, wind-proof and warm. "You can wear it with just a thin shirt underneath and be warm on the mountain, and it still feels good against your skin." At her suggestion, her parents bought her the jacket as a gift last year from Portland specialty store The Mountain Shop. G.I. Joe's in Vancouver also carries the jackets. Retail prices on Marmot soft-shell jackets range from \$150 to \$250.

Gretchen Schwinn models a Marmot soft-shell jacket.



To help you out with the hunt for the perfect gift, we're calling upon Clark County people with hobbies and interests to offer suggestions for 12 days.

OK, so we know that the 12 days of Christmas actually start on Christmas and count down to Epiphany.

But the song — a partridge in a pear tree, two turtledoves and all that — inspired us. We promise, no French hens, no calling birds, no geese a-laying or any of that. Just good gift ideas and some special help for the procrastinators among us on Christmas Eve.

— Columbian staff



GIFT IDEAS

- Day 1, for the crafter:** Clover Yarn Cutter Pendant, folding scissors.
- Day 2, for the foodie:** Sur La Table gift card.
- Day 3, for the gardener:** garden gloves.
- Day 4, for the runner:** Nike's water-wicking pants.
- Day 5, for the car buff:** Armor All Holiday Gift Pack
- Day 6, for the video game fan:** "Madden '07," "Call of Duty 3," and "Marvel: Ultimate Alliance."
- Day 7, for the sports fan:** Steve Largent Seattle Seahawks throwback jersey.

your
Guide:

Use our map to get the best view of the Christmas Ships Parade /D3



Stallone climbs back in the ring one more time with 'Rocky Balboa' /D4



Television: Visions of a normal marriage an essential ingredient of 'Medium' /D7

Coming Wednesday:

Graphic novels present new challenges for libraries /D1

PORTRAIT of a photographer



DAVID PLECHL for The Columbian

Jenny Multer often has to work on hands and knees to elicit good photographs out of children. In this case, mother Robin Carman helps off-camera by asking 4-year-old Taylor if sitting patiently for this picture is "worth a trip to the Disney store."

Photographer:

From Page D1

Americans that make a living with a camera, according to recent census data. In this country, adults are six times more likely to be a doctor. The median annual salary for a photographer, though, is \$26,000, and about half of them work for themselves.

Besides dreams of starting her own studio — primarily shooting weddings, births and high school seniors — Multer wants to be able to take pictures outside of a mall. She would like to use natural light, be more creative. She thinks she could make more money. After seven years of this kind of studio work, Multer can't imagine that her future artistry will be limited to coercing young kids and pets to cooperate for the camera.

J.C. Penney's portrait studio, owned by the same company as Flash, hired Multer at 18 because she showed interest and enthusiasm when she came in to have pictures taken with her family members. The 25-year-old's only formal training has been the two weeks of prep given by

the company. She's been learning about the business on the job ever since.

From late September on

Portrait photographers start getting busy with holiday work before Halloween. By the time December finally comes, the pace is frantic. Multer has been working six days a week since late September. She volunteered to work her last day off, so she's in the middle of a nearly two-week straight stretch and is sniffing from a cold.

The 2-year-old girl, Lilli, is back on the bench, ready for another try. Multer waves a teddy bear. She takes another shot. Lilli's up. She's crying. Multer gives her a book to read. More candy. Lilli sits. Another shot. Lilli's up. Her dad takes her for a walk. They come back. The little girl finally flops on the floor in protest.

"Do you want to go see Santa? Or do you want to go home?" her father growls.

One of the Flash receptionists offers to get Lilli a balloon. Before she can return, the Kirkleys are gone, saying they will try back later.

"People want their Christmas cards to get sent out," Multer says. "So they'll do anything to get that picture."

Multer adds that from observing others, she's learned not to battle with her kids anymore when they don't want to sit still, no matter how much effort she's put into setting up a shot. She just tries again at another time, on another day.

The studio is directly across the concourse from a toy store. That gives parents another option this time of year, Multer says: "bribery."

Flash has six photographers on its 19-person staff, all female. Typically, they shoot photos for 30 minutes, then process images for 30 minutes, repeating that cycle over and over. But when it's really busy, like this month, they often just keep shooting. Multer usually completes eight to 10 sessions a day. She has photographed as many as 15 different sets of clients in a single shift. But that's still a better pace than J.C. Penney, she says, where photographers were allowed just 10 minutes in the studio per customer. "There are times," she says, "that you can't help but feel mechanical."

The move up the ranks from J.C. Penney to Flash wasn't about money. Multer received an increase of 50 cents an hour. She mostly was attracted by the idea of getting triple the amount of time with each subject.

Multi-tasking

Photographers at Flash don't just take pictures and process images. They also are expected to answer phones, chat with prospective customers and sell photo packages. Multer on this day noticed a group of people standing around in the back of the shop, so she asked if she could help. They ended up ordering about \$600 worth of photographs. Multer doesn't get a commission on any of the work she does. She earns an hourly rate of \$10.85. The company, meanwhile, expects each half-hour sitting to generate at least \$185 worth of business.

A few hours later, the Kirkleys have come back for one more try. The father, Ian, is talking on his cellular telephone when they arrive. As soon as Lilli realizes where she has ended up again, she starts to fuss and squirm. The mother, Electra, tells

Ian, "Get off! I need you." He quickly hangs up and takes more candy out of his pocket.

The 2-year-old becomes entranced as Multer pops a ball into the air while making pfffft sounds. Lilli's older brother plays along when Multer asks him to get on the studio floor.

"Ride him like a horsey," Multer tells Lilli. "Get him!"

Lilli laughs as she jumps on her brother's back. Multer gets the shot.

"Get him again!" Multer then deftly moves the kids into a couple of traditional poses. This time, Lilli is happy and smiling. She puts an ornament on a small Christmas tree. She hugs her brother. Multer gets a few more shots, then signals to the parents that she has what she needs.

Lilli cheers, "I did it!"

Multer quickly begins editing the pictures as the Kirkleys gather their things. For her, there's no time to celebrate. Another session starts in just a few minutes.

BRETT OPPEGAARD writes general-interest features. Reach him at 360-759-8028 or brett.oppegaard@columbian.com.

Rocky Balboa dominates in Stallone's world

The character pushes the actor aside when Philadelphia fans are watching

By DAVID HILTBRAND
The Philadelphia Inquirer

PHILADELPHIA — Someone has a sizable police escort waiting downstairs. The motorcycle cops are huddled in the hotel lobby to escape the year's first cold snap. Outside, a phalanx of patrol cars sits, yellow caution lights slowly spinning.

Upstairs, Sylvester Stallone insists it isn't him they're waiting for. It's Rocky.

"The character has transcended," he says. "He's a real living person in Philadelphia. I'm just along for the ride. I have no illusions that any of this is for me."

Anyone who doubts that the Philly brawler is still the people's champ in this town should have been on the set when "Rocky Balboa" was filming here last December. Thirty years after he first entered the ring in the Oscar-winning "Rocky," the Rock is still treated by rank-and-file Philadelphians with a kind of reverence.

Milo Ventimiglia, star of NBC's "Heroes," who plays the fighter's estranged son in "Rocky Balboa," the sixth film in this underdog saga (opening Wednesday), relates that the hardest part of the shoot was getting used to being invisible.

"People would walk on the set all the time right past the cast and crew," he says. "They'd pay no attention to us whatsoever. Just walk directly up to Sly, say what they had to say, and then walk away. It's like we weren't even there."

Stallone knows the feeling. He's gotten used to people addressing him when it's obvious they're really talking to Rocky. "The character has overtaken the guy who invented him," he concedes.

Of course, it's easy to conflate the actor and his creation. Rocky is the role that Stallone was seemingly born to play. At 60, Stallone still has the perpetually tousled look of a man who just woke up from a nap in an overheated room. It could (and does) easily pass for the tenderized appearance of a guy who has tasted the business end of far too many Everlast gloves. (In Stallone's case, the droopy expression is the result of an obstetrician who pinched his head too hard with forceps during his delivery.)

Even though the character has attained iconic status, Stallone had trouble getting backing for "Rocky Balboa," the capstone to the Rocky cycle. He kept running into the same industry perception: No one wants to see a movie about a boxer at 58, the age when most guys are fighting prostate problems, not taking on an undefeated heavyweight champion in his prime.

"Ageism was a real problem," Stallone admits, "and I said, 'I understand that. That's what the story is about.' They said, 'No. Don't be glib with us.' I said, 'Yeah, but it's kind of intriguing.' They said, 'No, not intriguing at all.' MGM said, 'Over our dead bodies.' The producers didn't want to do it. It was over."



MGM

Sylvester Stallone reprises his famous role as a prizefighter in "Rocky Balboa." It was another fight to get the movie made.

But like his counterpunching alter ego, Stallone refused to give up. In part that was because he was dissatisfied with 1990's "Rocky V," and was determined to write a new final chapter that would send off his hero on a positive note.

The dark and depressing "Rocky V" grossed \$41 million. (The 1976 original made \$117

million domestically; the highest U.S.-grossing installment was "Rocky IV," with \$128 million in 1985.)

"It sunk in that we had failed," he says, "and really disappointed a lot of people, myself included. I really felt like I had let everyone down."

The other motivation to reprise Rocky was that Stallone's

ROCKY BALBOA

CAST: Sylvester Stallone, Burt Young, Milo Ventimiglia.

DIRECTOR: Sylvester Stallone.

SCREENPLAY: Sylvester Stallone.

RATED: PG.

OPENS WEDNESDAY AT: Battle Ground Cinema, Broadway Metro, Cascade 16, Cinema 99, City Center, Lloyd Center, Vancouver Plaza.

film career was stalling. The options for an aging action star narrow precipitously.

Yet he still wanted to work. "My kids had never seen me act," he says. He has three pre-teen daughters with his third wife, Jennifer Flavin. "They thought their father's occupation was being a bad golfer."

He knew that if there was one project he could still drive to market, it was the "Rocky" franchise he owned. So he set about writing a script.

In the earliest versions of "Rocky Balboa," Adrian was still alive and Rocky was trying to run the gym Mickey left him as a youth center. He goes, porkpie hat in hand, to every civic leader in Philly to ask for funding. Finally he figures his only hope of keeping the place open is to go barnstorming, fighting in exhibitions.

Nah, too melodramatic, Stallone decided. It would be better to saddle Rocky with grief. So instead, Adrian has passed on (from "the women's cancer") and a computer-simulated fight on ESPN between a young Rock and the current champ, Mason Dixon (boxer Antonio Tarver), sparks renewed interest in the ancient warrior.

That's the version that found

its way into the hands of Revolution Studios chief Joe Roth. Suddenly, it was let's-get-ready-to-rumble time again.

The announcement that there would be a sixth "Rocky" film was met with derision. "I totally understood that," Stallone says. "If somebody said, 'OK, we're doing 'Godfather VI,' right away you go, 'Pleeese, make it go away!' Naturally you're going to get hit with that as soon as you announce something that sounds incredibly stupid."

And yes, he heard all the jokes. Like Letterman's "Top Ten Signs Sylvester Stallone Is Too Old to Play Rocky" (No. 5: "His stunt double: Wilford Brimley"). And Bill Maher's quip that at this stage, the only acceptable title for another sequel would be "Rocky Dies."

"I rolled with it," Stallone says. "That's what the movie is about: trying to turn around people's skepticism about being too old."

Having provided Rocky with the satisfying send-off he deserves, Stallone can let go of his battle-scarred creation. That is, if the public lets him.

"People still expect you somewhat to be the character," he says, "and that's hard because Rocky's so even-keeled. He keeps it all inside. I wish I was that noble."

Then it's off to join his police escort, which whisks him out to a Philadelphia Eagles Monday-night game. All the TV personalities who interview him conclude by asking him to address them as Rocky would. So it's "Yo, Sal" Paolantonio and "Yo, Tony" Kornheiser.

All of which Stallone puts up with good-naturedly. After all, it's not him they're asking.