

# The Annual Cowchip Awards

**FOR THE RECORD:** This story has been corrected to reflect that crocodiles were found in a wading pool in the town of Bernalillo, not Bernalillo County.

By Leslie Linthicum

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Careful followers of news and New Mexicana might have noticed something missing from the Journal at this time last year: namely, Cowchips, the annual rundown of the weird, wacky and only-in-New Mexico stories of the year past.

We took a year off from Cowchips—the first break in a 19-year tradition—in observance of the retirement of Journal staff writer Fritz Thompson, who invented the feature and carefully crafted it each December.

When the master turned in his pen, it seemed appropriate that Cowchips should also be history. But what a dark and humorless year it was without them.

So we reinstitute Cowchips this year with reverence for their creator and a promise to try to muddle through. And we humbly offer the 2004 Cowchip of the Year Award to Fritz, who has surely done something in the past 12 months to deserve it.

Now, on with the news ...

STATE FAIR DILEMMA NO. 1

Thinking that the New Mexico State Fair might be dragging on too long, fair commissioners got together to consider cutting the 17-day event to something shorter. After a daylong meeting, they voted to change the fair's length to 18 days.

NO GOOD DEED GOES UNZAPPED

State Police officers Clint Varnell and Lance Batemen were struck by lightning while they were helping a stranded motorist during a thunderstorm near Portales. "Sharp pain," said Batemen. "Sharp pain in my head and then I was out."

CAT GOT YOUR TONGUE? NO, ONLY MY FINGER

A finger, detached from its rightful human owner, turned up outside the jaguar exhibit at Albuquerque's Rio Grande Zoo. Cagey zoo officials said they were looking for a zoo visitor with only four digits.

SANDOVAL COUNTY

WEDDING BELLS,

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE

I NOW PRONOUNCE YOU WIFE AND WIFE (OR IS IT HUSBAND AND HUSBAND?)

For eight hours on Feb. 21, Sandoval County Clerk Victoria Dunlap issued marriage licenses to gay couples while two ministers stood outside the courthouse and performed impromptu weddings.

I NOW PRONOUNCE YOU IN VIOLATION OF THE LAW

Late in the day, Attorney General Patricia Madrid told Dunlap to stop because state law leaves marriage to couples of one man and one woman.

I NOW PRONOUNCE YOU OUT OF OUR CLUB

So upset was it by Dunlap's actions that the Sandoval County Republican Party said it would take her off the ballot as a Republican if it could. The Republican Central Committee voted to censure the Republican clerk. "Other than assassination," the committee chairman said, "all we can do is censure her."

## I NOW PRONOUNCE YOU NUTS

After a month of court battles over the issue, Dunlap said she was sick of the waiting and would start issuing licenses to gay couples again. Sandoval County Commission Chairman Daymon Ely said, "It's official. She's a nut."

THERE ONCE WAS A BILL WITH A SCHEME  
TO BE PART OF A  
PRESIDENTIAL TEAM.  
HE KEPT SAYING NO  
SO THAT NO ONE  
WOULD KNOW  
THAT HE WAS V.P. ONLY IN HIS DREAM.

Gov. Bill Richardson declared himself not interested in being offered the vice presidential slot on the Democratic ticket so many times that his denials began to outstrip the rumors. Finally, he wrote presidential nominee John Kerry a letter on July 1 saying he wanted his name taken out of consideration. On July 6, Kerry tapped John Edwards for the No. 2 spot.

HIS SECOND PRIORITY? ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO CELEBRATE  
MOTHER'S DAY ON A HOG

Gov. Richardson posed on a Harley Davidson motorcycle as part of a state Tourism Department promotion to encourage people to explore New Mexico's scenic byways on Mother's Day.

While new Gov. Richardson was focusing on his top priorities, asking himself to be vice president and sitting on a Harley, old Gov. Gary Johnson was hangin' in a hot tub on the slopes of Taos Ski Valley. On his agenda after a post-Roundhouse summit of Mount Everest: Skiing, biking, swimming, growing his hair to his shoulders, tending his frostbitten big toe.

WE'RE No. 1! NO, WE'RE No. 1!

Gov. Richardson got busy in his second year in office, stating that his top priority was water projects. Then stating that his top priority was funding a drop-out prevention program. Then saying his top priority was upgrading the state's computers. Then naming DWI legislation as his top priority. Then trade with Mexico. Then preventing forest fires.

RIDDLE: WHO'S BURIED IN BILLY THE KID'S TOMB?

Three Southern New Mexico lawmen went to court to get permission to dig up the body of Billy the Kid's mother in Silver City to compare her DNA to the DNA of the body buried in Billy the Kid's grave in Fort Sumner.

HINT: DON'T ASK THE FORT SUMNER MAYOR FOR HELP IN SOLVING THE RIDDLE

Fort Sumner politicians fought the attempt, and the mayor of the Billy the Kid-crazy town called the crusading lawmen "three idiots" for doubting The Kid was buried in his own grave.

HINT #2: DON'T LOOK IN SANTA FE

Santa Fe police didn't care much about looking for Billy the Kid's body. They were busy looking for a statue of the outlaw that was stolen from a Santa Fe art gallery.

OH, FORGET IT, HE'S GOT A LAWYER

The Fort Sumner Chamber of Commerce established a legal defense fund for the outlaw and the governor appointed him a lawyer.

## GUESS WE'LL NEVER KNOW

Later in the year, the crusading lawmen dropped their request to dig up Billy's grave.

"ON THE FIRST DAY OF CHRISTMAS, AIRPORT SECURITY TOOK FROM ME ... ONE BAG OF WEED ..."

E. Shirley Baca, a member of the powerful state Public Regulation Commission, was on her way to a conference in New Jersey in early December when an airport scan saw something unusual in her checked suitcase. Under a pile of magazines, cops found a glass pipe and a stash of pot. Upon arrest, Baca said it wasn't hers. Then she invoked the power of country crooner Jeannie C. Riley with a threat: If her fellow commissioners made a move to unseat her, Baca said, she would "pull a Harper Valley PTA on them." No word on whether she also knows what Billy Joe McCallister threw off the Tallahatchie Bridge.

## AND THEN THERE WERE MORE ...

E. Shirley Baca was not the only high-level public official to find herself in the pokey in connection with mind-altering substances. New Mexicans would have done well to have a scorecard handy to keep track of the embarrassments.

## LAWMAKER/PICKUP/BOOZE

State House Minority Whip Joe Thompson attended a bill-signing ceremony at the state Capitol for tougher DWI laws, then less than 24 hours later was arrested in Downtown Albuquerque for DWI.

In the back of the three-term Republican lawmaker's pickup were clothes, shoes, a backpack, a clock, golf clubs, crutches, a tape recorder and books. He pleaded guilty.

## JUDGE/DWI CHECKPOINT/ BOOZE&COKE

In May, John Brennan, the chief judge of state District Court in Bernalillo County, was stopped when he tried to avoid a DWI checkpoint in Albuquerque. He registered twice the legal limit of intoxication and had cocaine in his lap.

Brennan resigned and pleaded guilty to DWI and cocaine possession.

## POLICE CHIEF/STOP SIGN/BOOZE

In December, the Loving Police Chief Harvey Rodriguez was pulled over for running a stop sign in Carlsbad and charged with DWI after he smelled of alcohol, failed a field sobriety test and refused to take a breath test. Rodriguez was placed on administrative leave.

OUR DIFFERENCES ARE IRRECONCILABLE,

SO PART WE MUST.

BUT BEFORE IT'S OFFICIAL,

ONE FINAL, PUBLIC FUSS.

I ON THIS SIDE AND YOU ON THAT,

THE CAMERAS WILL RECORD OUR MARITAL SPAT.

WHEN IT'S OVER, LOOK AT US --

NOT A SCRATCH IN THE FIGHT.

ONLY ALBUQUERQUE WAS WOUNDED

ON TV TONIGHT.

Albuquerque Mayor Martin Chávez and his wife, Margaret Aragón de Chávez, announced they were divorcing, then they arrived together at a U.S. Conference of Mayors event in Boston. With city workers picketing, Chávez tried to cross the picket line, but his wife stayed back.

They argued. A Boston TV crew's cameras started rolling. They argued some more.

And Aragón de Chávez left her husband, picked up a sign and joined the protesters while the mayor went inside.

A short time later, Aragón de Chávez let on she might like to run for mayor.

KEEP WALKING, I'M TRYING TO STAY WARM

A University of New Mexico doctor came up with a unique way to solve two of the world's problems: energy scarcity and homelessness. He advocated putting the nation's homeless on exercise bikes attached to a generator. Endorphin Power Co. would help addicts sweat out the booze and pills while providing clean power to everyone else. It was the brainchild of Dr. Sam Sliselman, who said, "I'm really nervous about turning people off."

RIBS, CORNBREAD AND HONEY— \$30; CALL FROM AIR FORCE ONE—  
PRICELESS

On his way out of town after a speech in Roswell, President Bush ordered his motorcade to pull into the parking lot of the Nuthin' Fancy Cafe on Main Street where the commander in chief ordered takeout. He got ribs, corn bread and honey, paid with \$30 in cash and failed to tip the server. He later called the restaurant from Air Force One to say, "You didn't charge me enough and I'm going to send more money."

I LOVE HER, SHE LOVES ME NOT

Saying he went "ga-ga" over his secretary in the midst of a midlife crisis, Sandoval County Treasurer Jim Truscio wrote love letters and love poems to her and kept an "Angel File" on his desk— a diary he made public so everyone in his office could know of his feelings.

The secretary filed a sexual harassment claim against Truscio, 62, who denied there was anything sexual about his attentions.

Sandoval County settled the sexual harassment claim, Sandoval County voters dumped Truscio in November and Truscio took out a newspaper ad to tell his wife, "I've been a fool."

LOAD, AIM, FIRE OFF PRESS RELEASE

A national anti-hunting group that calls hunters "serial killers" and "Bambi butchers" lauded New Mexico as among the top 10 states where the sport has seen a major drop. In fact, New Mexico actually saw a double-digit increase in the number of people getting hunting licenses.

THE DOOR WILL YIELD TO THE NAKED GENTLEMAN FROM MORA

Rep. Bengie Regensberg was absent from the Capitol for a key vote in the House late on a Friday night, so State Police officers went to his hotel to find him. Police said Regensberg was drunk and combative when he answered the door and put one of the officers in a choke hold. Regensberg, a Democrat from Mora, said the officers broke down his motel room door, threw him to the ground and kicked him. The lawmaker said he was naked and sober.

STATE FAIR DILEMMA No. 2

The New Mexico State Fair, the place where the New Mexico State Fair Commission meets and where the New Mexico State Fair is held every year, decided to change its name to something that more accurately described what happens at the New Mexico State Fair. The winner, naturally, was New Mexico Expo, which is now the location where the

fair is held but not the name of the fair. A bill in the state Legislature that would have changed the name of the commission to match up with Expo failed.

#### EAT LUNCH, PICK PRESIDENT

In February, New Mexico tried a new approach to helping the nation choose a presidential candidate. The party-run caucus process involved Democrats casting ballots in a cafeteria in Farmington, a truck stop in Milan, the office of a condominium complex in Angel Fire and a bed and breakfast in Columbus.

#### EAT UP, GET OUT OF JAIL FREE

A Metropolitan Court judge in Albuquerque acquitted a 5-foot-9-inch man charged with drunken driving because he was administered a standard field sobriety test even though he weighed 237 pounds. The judge said the man's failure to walk in a straight line and stand on one leg could have been caused by being tubby as well as being tight.

#### TO DO LIST: BAKE PIES, BAKE MORE PIES, PUT HIT ON DA

The owner of Señor Pies, an Albuquerque pie shop, was arrested for offering an employee half of his pie business if the employee would kill an assistant district attorney for him.

Señor Pie wanted the prosecutor eliminated because he suspected she was going to bring him into court on lesser criminal charges.

#### EXTRA MUSTARD, HOLD THE PHLEGM

A 19-year-old Burger King cook pleaded guilty to battery after he delivered a spit ball into a Rio Rancho police officer's Whopper.

#### ME CAVEMAN, YOU NOT PAYING VERY GOOD ATTENTION

Officials at Los Alamos Laboratory, busy guarding the nation's nuclear secrets, apparently overlooked a 56-year-old Amarillo native who had set up housekeeping in a cave and had been living on lab property for at least four years. He had outfitted his cave with a wood-burning stove, glass doors, solar power, a bed and a satellite radio. True to his ZIP code, he had a Web site on which he explained his Single Big Bang/Single Expanding Universe/Finite Cosmos physics theory.

#### COCKADOODLE DON'T

A former "Baywatch" babe and a former "Golden Girl" called on New Mexico to ban cockfighting. Pamela Anderson wrote a letter to Gov. Bill Richardson on behalf of the roosters while Rue McClanahan met with Albuquerque Mayor Martin Chávez. "The whole country is watching," Anderson said. "Especially Hollywood."

#### APT. FOR RENT w/POOL, SCALY NGBRS

A landlord in Bernalillo in Sandoval County checked on an apartment he was renting after the tenant moved out and found two South American spectacled caimans—crocodiles— in a wading pool in the living room.

I PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE TO THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, AND IN THE RIO RANCHO MID-HIGH GYM I WILL STAND, WITH ONE THOUSAND REPUBLICANS, UNDER OATH, TO VOTE FOR BUSH/CHENEY IN THE FALL.

The Republican Party gave away tickets to a election-year rally by Vice President Dick Cheney in Rio Rancho, but it screened the crowd by requiring that those attending sign a pledge to support Bush/Cheney.

#### NIGHT, NIGHT, SLEEP LIGHT

De Baca County Sheriff Gary Graves set up a cot in his office and slept at work to

protect his files from prying eyes after the county commission put detention employees in his office. Graves was kept awake by loud inmates in the nearby jail and by large bugs crawling on his body.

PSST, WANNA SCORE SOME OVER-THE-COUNTER DIGESTION AID?

An eighth-grader at Rio Rancho Mid-High School was suspended for five days under the school's zero-tolerance policy for passing around drugs in the lunchroom. He was carrying a popular street drug known as Gas-X.

CHEERS TO YOU AND ALL YOUR ROLE MODELS

School officials at Rio Grande High School apologized for giving shot glasses as favors for the school's homecoming dance. The activities director who chose the glasses said he didn't think any of the teen grads would actually use them to drink alcohol.

DO AS I SAY, HIC, NOT AS I DO

An Albuquerque Public Schools board member suggested the school district adopt a drinking policy for the grown-ups it employs similar to its zero-tolerance policy for students after a middle school principal was arrested on a DWI charge.

HEY, LITTLE RED RIDING FOOTBALL FAN, YOU SURE ARE LOOKIN' GOOD

The University of New Mexico Lobos football team considered having a live wolf as a mascot at its home games and displayed a wolfish-looking canine that was trying out for the part. The wolf, owned by a UNM professor, turned out to be a wolf-dog hybrid and UNM athletics officials nixed the idea. "There will be no dog at UNM home games next season," the athletic department's spokesman said.



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