

THE IDLE AMERICAN

Leave It to the Aggies....

Commentary by Dr. Don Newbury

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Texas A&M University-- a major educational institution respected throughout the world--emerged unscathed from a litany of "Aggie jokes" that were shared for decades, though not so much now.

They were, of course--exactly that--jokes. Actually, they likely enhanced a storied heritage, but they made some Aggies M-A-D.

My Uncle Mort's keen eye on Texas A&M literature fell on its Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications. He figures "ALEC" would better fit on business cards, and that graduates could be called "Smart-ALECs."....

When reduced to deep thinking about TV commercials--and such tedium is not recommended--one often enters the twilight zone of obfuscation. An example is a current home security system advertisement that promises an immediate warning when an "uninvited intruder" approaches.

Sudden thought: Are intruders ever invited?

I prefer warnings about calls from roof repair people who "happen to be in the neighborhood, and happy to provide a free roof inspection." I dismiss them, telling them I've got relatives in the business....

Another ad deserving a "thumbs down" urges purchase of Charmin bathroom tissue. The announcer forgets that for decades, "toilet paper" was not to be discussed in polite company.

He introduces a dancing bear that sings instead of talking, with references to smiling "from cheek to cheek" and "enjoying the go."

Please. Where is Mr. Whipple when we need him? When he starred, he asked only that we avoid squeezing the Charmin....

While on the subject of TV ads, let's not overlook State Farm Insurance. The company's current "push" is provided by movie star/former California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

The guy may have been an okay actor and--in the eyes of California voters, anyway--an okay governor.

State Farm had best line up world-class linguistics professors if he is expected to pronounce “neighbor” in an acceptable manner. However, “NAY-BAHHH” that rolls off his tongue causes us to think immediately of State Farm....

Advertising and public relations have come a long way. Communication was far simpler several decades ago. Back in the day, many stores only “ads” were front door “OPEN” and “CLOSED” signs.

At Lum and Abner’s “Jot ‘em Down Store”--mentioned regularly on their weekly radio shows--store hours were simply stated: “Open when we get here and closed when we leave.”

It was these comedic buddies who offered a simple explanation about their merchandise. “If you need it, we got it,” they bragged. “And if we don’t have it, you don’t need it.” The radio show was immensely popular from 1931-1954, originating from their fictitious community of Pine Ridge, AR....

Relatively new on the advertising scene in all media are appeals by law firms. In the previous century, lawyers gave little thought to outright ads, perhaps thinking such to be tacky and/or beneath their dignity. Now, they’re after it, hammer and tong, with ads “clumping up” primarily during news broadcasts. (Truth to tell, I’m not sure I’ve heard of lawyers armed with tongs. Maybe “tongs” sounds too much like a kitchen weapon.)

In Texas, attorney Thomas J. Henry must have a multi-million-dollar ad venture underway.

With offices in Corpus Christi, San Antonio, Austin, Houston and Dallas, the principal is often shown flying from court session to court session, and sometimes is pictured near his plane, which has “TJH” painted on its tail....

Looking back , I was given to hyperbole in my youth. Surely it was youthful innocence on my part, or maybe not.

During early teen years, I peddled Cloverine Salve, bragging that any place you could rub it, stuff or sniff it, curative powers prevailed. I sold enough of the stuff to win a guitar. Alas, the guitar never arrived.

A few decades later, I saw a familiar face in a TV musical group. I couldn’t call his name, but he’d been our rural mail carrier. And, he was not known as a guitarist until after my guitar was to have arrived at our mailbox....

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