



Basic Black by Arthur Black

Take this job and shove it

You want a sure-fire conversation starter? Ask people about the worst job they ever had. You get some great answers.

I met a guy who used to work in an auto assembly plant in Ontario. His job was to put the left rear tire on every Ford that came down the assembly line. He said that when the heat was on, he could do 52 cars an hour. He reckoned he handled 24 tons worth of tires each working day.

My worst job? Well, I was a tar and gravel roofer for a couple of summers. That was pretty bad, lugging buckets of stinking, boiling pitch all day under the blazing sun. We wore heavy pants, hats, gloves and shirts with long sleeves buttoned at the wrist because it was so hot on the roof, it really didn't make any difference if you were swaddled like a Bedouin or wearing a thong. And the heavy clothes meant you didn't get burned by the pitch. As much. What made it really ugly was that I worked with a crew of semi-insane French Canadians who liked to start work at 4 AM when it was cool. Which would have been fine, except that after eight hours, overtime kicked in and we would work all afternoon as well.

My impromptu survey has taught me one thing: a job doesn't have to bust your hump to qualify as bad. A lot of the really crummy jobs are white-collar and found, surprisingly, in the world of science.

Take Helge Zieler, a veteran research biologist who works in Brazil. His area of expertise is mosquitoes. Zieler's job is to hike into the depths of the rain forest, sit down and roll up his sleeves - and count the number of mosquito bites he and his fellow researchers endure.

Brazilian mosquitoes are an especially ravenous breed. Zieler once tabulated 3,000 bites over a three-hour period. That works out to 17 bites a minute.

Other lousy science jobs? Well, there's a laboratory in Virginia where, every working day, 19 people report for duty - all probably praying that they win the lottery that week. They are 'dysentery stool sample analyzers'. Which means they get to crack open stool-sample canisters and analyze the contents all the live-long day.

Which, bad as it sounds, is probably more pleasant than the work done by two 'special assistants' recently hired by Michael Levitt. He's a gastroenterologist in Minneapolis, hard at work on a study of how, ahem, bodily gas provides clues to the health of digestive organs.

Which is where the two 'special assistants' come in. Their job description: Flatus Odour Judges. They got to take a deep whiff of 100-odd canned samples of human flatulence and to rank them by degree of reek.

Another job I heard about but failed to track down: Barnyard Masturbators. Apparently some researchers are tasked with 'gathering' animal sperm needed for research on fertility and artificial insemination.

Egad. You don't suppose that's where the phrase 'chicken jerky' comes from?

Ah, but let me leave you with a related - and sunnier - story. This one comes from Alberta where a tiny advertisement recently appeared in the University of Calgary student newspaper. The ad was placed by an Australian group called The Reproductive Medicine Clinic, a fertility clinic in the town of Albury, in New South Wales.

The clinic is looking for healthy young Canadian men between the ages of 18 and 40. Qualifications? Functioning gonads is about all that's required. The Clinic is offering the lucky applicants a free plane ticket to Australia and back, two weeks accommodation and meals, all expenses paid, a free medical exam thrown in.

And all the lads have to do is donate some sperm every couple of days.

But hang on -- this seems like a rather unchallenging assignment. Why Calgary semen? Aren't Ozzie blokes up to the task, as it were?

Apparently it's tough to get Australian volunteers these days because of a new law that says sperm donors Down Under can no longer remain anonymous. Not surprisingly, the Australian clinic has been flooded with eager Albertan applicants.

Can't say I'm surprised. As jobs go, it sure beats roofing.



Staying in Touch

MPP John O'Toole

Public Transit Users Deserve a Tax Break

When the Legislature resumes, I will be presenting a resolution calling for an income tax deduction for Ontario residents who make use of public transit. My resolution calls for the House to consider allowing all receiptable expenses for public transit to be tax deductible against provincial income tax. This would include those who use GO Transit.

While it is important to improve and maintain Ontario's road infrastructure, we must encourage the use of public transit. Many communities have excellent, but under-used transit systems, and I feel that an incentive would help. By offering a modest income tax deduction for public transit users, we would see more revenues for transit systems and there would be reduced traffic on our roads. The result would be less gridlock, greater efficiency for those using our highways, and less wear and tear on our streets, freeways, roads and bridges.

Please let me know your views on ways to encourage the use of public transit. I can be reached at 905-697-1501 or 1-800-661-2433

New Fishing Regs. Online

Anglers seeking information about changes in 2004 regulations can now obtain Ontario's

Recreational Fishing Regulations Summary online from the MNR web site at www.mnr.gov.on.ca

Update on Book Drive

There's been a good response from Durham Riding towards the collection of used books for young readers in Northern Ontario First Nations communities. This initiative was recently announced by His Honour James K. Bartleman, Ontario's Lieutenant Governor. Thanks to everyone who called to ask how they can get involved. I understand that OPP stations will accept the books or they may also be sent to the Office of the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, Queen's Park, Toronto, ON M7A 1A1. You are also welcome to drop off books at our Constituency Office (75 King St. E., Bowmanville).

2004 Levee - I would like to express my appreciation to everyone who joined us for the 2004 Durham Riding Levee January 11th. It's always good to start the New Year by getting re-acquainted with friends. I was honoured by the attendance of representatives from each of the municipal councils serving Durham Riding. Thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to welcome the New Year at Trillium Trails in Raglan.

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CAA Central Ontario

Code Red Alert continued

Heavy snowfall and high winds in parts of the province yesterday have prompted CAA Central Ontario to continue its Code Red Alert for the fifth consecutive day.

"CAA members in Central Ontario may wait up to 60 minutes for light service such as battery boosts and replacements," said Carey-Ann Greenham, media and public relations specialist. "And tow trucks may take up to 90 minutes to reach CAA members from the time their calls are taken."

CAA issues code Red Alerts when it receives an above-normal number of calls from members in need of assistance. On a normal winter day, the auto club receives 100 to 150 calls. Yesterday, more than 300 members per hour called for assistance.

During a Code Red Alert, members can use an alternate

service provider and will be fully reimbursed, under the same rules as their existing plan with CAA, upon receipt to the auto club within 30 days.

"The weather conditions today are causing treacherous driving conditions all over Central Ontario," said Greenham. "Allow yourself extra travel time on the roads."

Greenham adds that members are mostly reporting problems such as sliding off the roads or into other vehicles, dead batteries and vehicle lock-outs.

CAA Central Ontario members can also access emergency road services on-line at www.central.on.caa.ca.

CAA Central Ontario is a not-for-profit auto club offering insurance, travel and emergency road services. There are 1.7 million CAA members in Ontario and four million in Canada.