

Best of the New: Ideas

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A \$100 computer for the poor, help for battered women who don't think they can leave home, and a whole new kind of ice cream. Now that's innovation.

Keg ID Tags

In an effort to curb underage drinking, Boston's Licensing Board now requires any package store selling a 6-gallon or larger keg of beer to record the name, address, and birth date of the purchaser. Police get a copy, which raises some privacy worries. But a "keg tag" is attached to every barrel sold, allowing officers called to raucous house and dorm keggers to find the buyer quickly, in theory encouraging responsibility in the over-21 set. Requiring a buyer's name on every keg should make it easier for drinking-age young people to tell underage friends they'll just have to wait until they're old enough to buy their own.



(Globe Staff Photo / Suzanne Kreiter)

Designer House Calls

Membership in the Boston Design Center has new privileges. The Plush program allows members who pay a \$275 annual fee access to the 87 showrooms normally open only to designers, architects, and their clients. The program includes free consultation with a professional designer, but those meetings until last year were always held at the Design Center. Is that any way to make over a room? Plush members can now arrange to hold their four free hours of design consultation at home, making that precious time a more valuable benefit.

A Shelter for Pets

Pets can become pawns in abusive human relationships, says Kara Holmquist, board member of Noah's Ark, a confidential, temporary pet-foster program located at the new Family Justice Center (989 Commonwealth Avenue) in Brighton. Holmquist, also director of advocacy for the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, explains that victims are less likely to end

abusive relationships if that means leaving a pet behind. Any single reason not to leave is one too many, so Noah's Ark - which hopes to host 100 pets in its first year - is filling a real need.

Charles River Cleans Up

In 1995, John DeVillars, then the regional EPA administrator and now a board member on the Charles River Watershed Association, vowed to make the Charles swimmable by 2005. Last year, he made good, even plunging into the water near Boston's Nashua Street Park to mark the occasion. Except for short periods directly following major storms, the water has been declared safe for swimming between the Massachusetts Avenue bridge and the Museum of Science. Safe places for getting in and out of the river - like steps or a beach - haven't been built, however, so public swimming is still theoretical. It might be best to BYO canoe.

Shuttle-Flight Price War

JetBlue may be best known for last fall's flaming landing-gear incident in Los Angeles, but the low ticket prices it has offered while trying to break into the East Coast shuttle business are rocketing its reputation right back up again. Earlier this month, the price was \$40 each way for the less-than-an-hour flight between New York's JFK airport and Logan; service to Washington's Dulles got off the ground the middle of this month at \$55 each way. Every dollar that prices can inch closer to the Fung Wah Bus service's low fares - \$30 round trip to New York City, at least four hours each way - is a move in the right direction.

Re-Renaming the Garden "The Garden"

Even after Boston Garden was awkwardly renamed the FleetCenter, many fans still called the home of the Bruins and Celtics the "new Garden." Just as much as we don't want our Fenway Park to move, we wanted the tried-and-true for

the arena. Happily, a new sponsor has restored part of the old name to TD Banknorth Garden. Confused yet? Then join up and enjoy the new new Garden's new Premium Club, which has prime seating, a restaurant, and other luxury amenities for members. A VIP concierge, for example, can help you land hard-to-get theater, Red Sox, or Patriots tickets when you've had your fill of basketball, hockey, and top-shelf drinks. Expensive champagne? Cheap beer? Whatever it takes to lure fans back to hockey.

New Life for Lynn

The loft dwellers are coming! The loft dwellers are coming! That's the buzz in downtown Lynn, one more Boston-area city where long-vacant brick factories have been transformed into residences - at prices attractive to younger buyers and anybody else who can't buy nearer to the Hub. Quarters can start at \$160,000 for a loft studio; last year, a historic fire station was made into condos that started at \$239,000 for a one bedroom. But Lynn has something extra that's drawing a certain kind of resident - most in their 20s, 30s, and 40s: It has a scene. Locals hang out in hardscrabble Central Square, sipping wine at poetry slams held in the Gulu-Gulu Cafe. At least one tattooed celebrity chef, Robert Fathman from Azure in Boston, has moved to Lynn. Says Oxford Street Grill owner Lowell Gray, also a resident, "I see this neighborhood as very similar to what the South End was maybe 15 years ago."

Spicy Ice Cream

Foodies embrace the pairing of pepper and chocolate, and now similar heat is being added to ice cream. A quartet of flavors came out of the J.P. Licks kitchens in 2005 - convincing us that this wasn't just a flash in the ice cream maker - that stretched and challenged palates. Now, alongside the vanilla and strawberry, there are Tabasco- and wasabi-flavored ice creams, an El Diablo ice cream that combines red pepper, cinnamon, and chocolate, and Bloody Mary sorbet. Owner Vincent Petryk swears he understood the appeal of Tabasco's fiery flavor only after mixing it with sweet cream. Not designed to be drenched with hot fudge, these unusual flavors should be ingested slowly and thoughtfully.



(Design Continuum)

\$100 Laptops

Nicholas Negroponte, a founder of MIT's Media Lab invention factory, calls it his most important contribution: a \$100 educational computer designed for the world's poorest children. Negroponte believes that for almost every social, political, and economic problem now challenging the most destitute regions of Africa and Asia, the best solution is education. To this end, he has created a simple, hand-cranked Internet device that uses free software and has built-in wireless network hardware, keeping costs down and sidestepping existing telecom infrastructures - which is why poor governments, many of which rely on revenues from such telecom enterprises, will likely try to prevent the machines' widespread distribution.

Cartoonist College

What do an Ivy League graduate and a former college basketball player from Texas have in common



with a few art-school types? They're members of the first class at The Center for Cartoon Studies in White River Junction, Vermont, which opened last fall. Cofounder James Sturm believes his is the only institution of higher learning where applicants submit a comic featuring themselves, a snowman, and a robot. But it's not all fun; tuition alone is \$14,000 - and that doesn't include colored pencils. Results from the first semester look good: "It's a pass/no credit system," says Sturm, "just like Harvard Medical School." ■



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