

DID YOU KNOW...?

Who first came up with the unusual collective words used for groups of animals?

By Jack Bagley didyouknowcolumn@gmail.com

May Day! May Day!
No, I'm not calling for help with a disaster ... I'm celebrating the first day of May.

Which has always been called "May Day."
The fifth month of the year is now here. The year is going by very, very quickly, even though some of the days and actual hours tend to drag at times.

As I get older (and we all do it) I notice time flies faster. The race to the end is only with one's self, however, and I'm not sure I want to beat myself to the finish line.

If that made any sense to you, please explain it to me. I don't even know what I'm talking about.

But I do know about trivia, and it's time to share some with you. Enjoy, friends.

Did you know ...
... you will find only two escalators in the entire state of Wyoming? The state's sole moving staircases are in Casper, Wyoming. The rest of the state - all 97,914 square miles of it - either uses single-story buildings, stairs, or elevators. (Talk about getting nowhere fast!)

... the well-known delivery service FedEx™ was saved by gambling? The founder of Federal Express, Frederick W. Smith (born 1944), created his delivery service in 1971. It was not an immediate financial success, and once Smith needed to secure a business loan to pay off a fuel bill of \$24,000. The loan was denied, and Smith had only \$5,000 in the bank. He took the cash to Las Vegas, and played blackjack. Normally, such a story has a sad ending, but not in this case. Smith won \$27,000, paid off the fuel bill, and kept the company going for one more week. That's when fortunes began to change, as Smith was able to raise \$11 million, and now FedEx, as the company is called today, is worth a whopping \$47 billion in annual revenue. (Now that's what I call "putting it all on the line.")

... your favorite dog or cat may not love you as much as you think? Of course, our fur babies are part of the family, but scientists think that the urge for survival is stronger than a pet's love for its owner. If a pet owner dies at home and there is nobody to feed the pet, dogs and cats are known to begin scavenging the bodies of their deceased caregivers. (That's a rather depressing thought.)

... drying your laundry outside really does make it smell better? The reason is photolysis. That's when the sunlight breaks down the compounds in the laundry that cause odor, like body oils or perspiration that the detergents didn't remove. (So, the detergent doesn't do it, the sunlight does. So much for detergent ads.)

... you inhale one or two molecules of the same air you inhaled as a baby with every breath you take? Bear with me here. When you exhale, almost all of the molecules of air disperse in the atmosphere. Almost all of them, because one or two hang around close enough to be re-inhaled with your next breath, and it's usually the same one or two. So you're still breathing some of the same air you started with. (I would imagine those molecules are pretty stale by now.)

... who came up with the source for many of the collective words used for animals? Sure, you've heard of a "gaggle of geese" or a "parliament of owls," but did you ever wonder where those terms came from? They were devised by one Juliana Berners (1388-1460), who wrote a treatise on hunting, hawks and heraldry called The Boke of St. Albans. In her work she ascribed such names as "swarm" for bees and "gaggle" for geese. Berners was also a Benedictine nun and Prioress of the Priory of St. Mary of Sopwell in Hertfordshire, England. Additional trivia note: Berners is also believed to have written a tome on fly fishing, the first such writing on the topic. Historians admit that the paper exists, but they have serious doubts that Berners actually wrote it. Still, she's sometimes referred to as "the first lady of fly fishing." (She certainly was "fishing" for words in her book, wasn't she?)

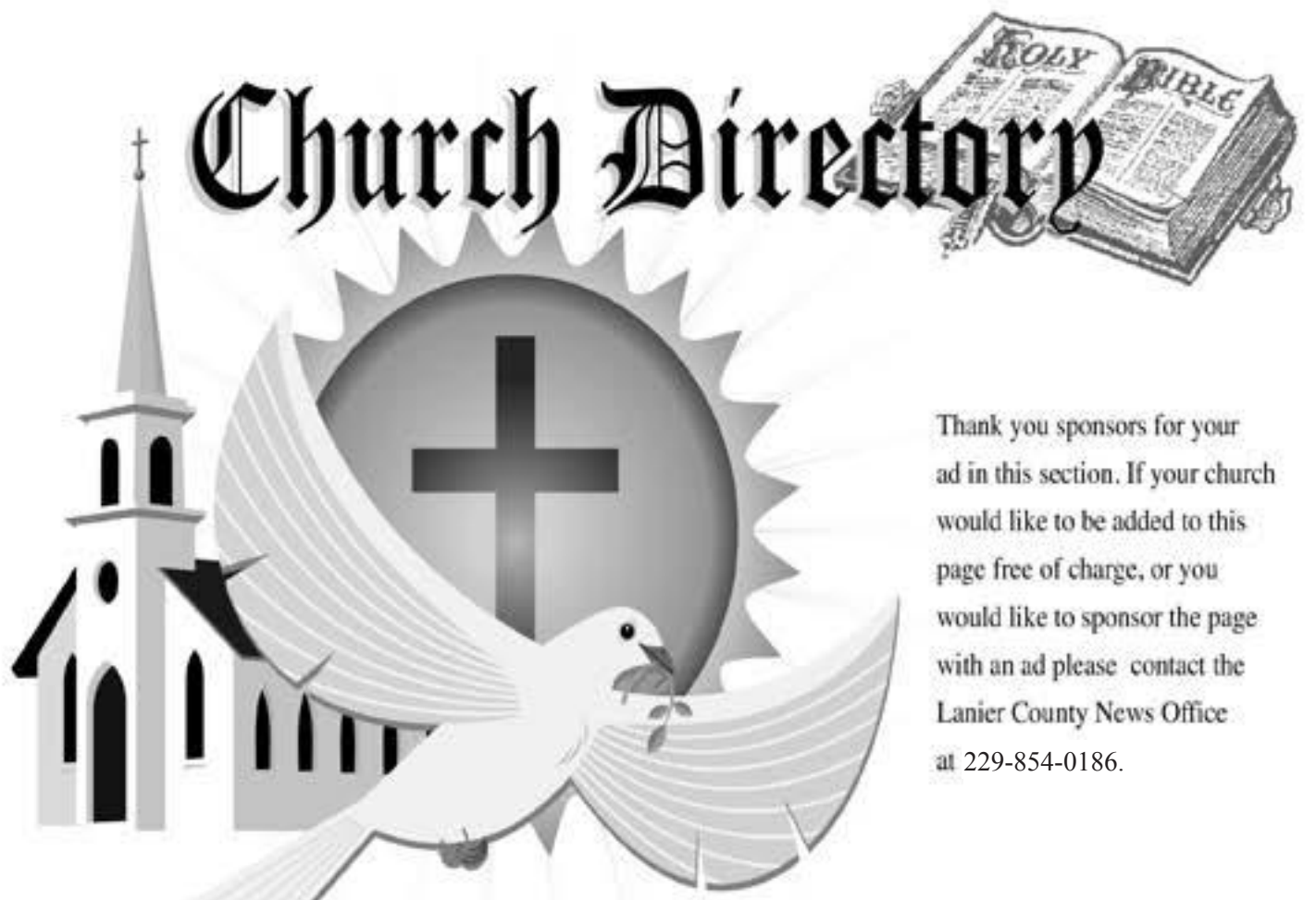
... members of the French Resistance really socked it to Hitler when he visited Paris in 1940? When German dictator Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) visited the French capital after conquering France, members of the Resistance cut the elevator cables in the Eiffel Tower to keep Hitler from visiting it. Faced with the prospect of having to climb more than 1,500 steps to get the bird's-eye view, Hitler glumly allowed himself to be photographed at the Tower's base instead and left the city. (The little cuts are the most significant, aren't they?)

... nine out of the ten deadliest snipers in World War II were Russian? Of those, one was a woman - Lyudmila Mikhailovna Pavlichenko (1916-1974). She is regarded as the most successful female sniper in history, with a recorded 309 kills. Following the war, she was a historian. (And in her history class, you paid attention ... or else.)

... the Netherlands has the highest concentration of museums in the world? In just the Amsterdam area alone, there are 42 different museums. (They're all worth visiting, too.)

... you - or someone you know - may suffer from the Google effect? It's a form of cognitive bias in which a person tends to forget information that can normally be found very quickly just by using an Internet search engine. (Suffer from it? I make a living from it!)

Now ... you know!



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