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A modest proposal to eliminate toilet feuds

By JAN GLIDEWELL
DYNWIRT

Okay, call me obsessed with bathrooms, and I know you will, but things are getting out of hand here.

We have had at least two violent incidents in as many years — one in Pasco County and one in Hernando County — over cross-gendered bathroom use. And we have also had a few non-violent ones.

None of this would be necessary if we just adopted what is becoming more and more common in Europe, and finally gaining a foothold here.

Unisex restrooms would not cure homophobia, an essential element in both of the violence cases, but it would remove anyone's justification for anger because a man dressed as a woman, or vice versa, was using a restroom based on dress rather than anatomy.

One man went to jail in Pasco after an altercation that began with him, in drag, using the women's room at a gay bar. Police were called on the other night after a fracas at an all-night restaurant in Spring Hill where a transsexual and mid-six-change was harassed after using the ladies' room there.

You'd think we had better things to worry about. Back in the 1970s I covered appearances by conservative and ERA activist Phyllis Schlafly and her feminist counterpart, Betty Friedan, at Saint Leo College.

One of the honorees that Schlafly was sure would result from a constitutional amendment giving women the right to equal treatment under the law was "unisex bathrooms," which she pronounced in a tone of voice usually reserved for discussion of the Red Menace. Heck, when it was a message or other scary stuff like kids reading Shakespeare.

Friedan's response has stayed with me for a quarter of a century. "When I flew here yesterday," she said, "the bathroom door on the airplane didn't say men or women. It just said occupied or unoccupied. It seemed to work."

Europeans have always had a less upright attitude about elimination, with street urinals for men common in Paris and Amsterdam (although I won't surprise women to know that there are not similar accommodations for them) and as many or more unisex bathrooms as there are sexually separated bathrooms.

It takes very little design alteration to make it possible for users of a unisex facility to have just as much privacy as in those where the genders are separated, and would make for a lot fewer problems — except for those generated by persons for whom the bathroom use in issue is only an excuse to give vent to big oty.

Unisex restrooms would also solve the problem endemic to just about every entertainment venue in the country: inadequate restroom facilities for women. I will go, regularly, to concerts and events where men are clustered around the cash bar while women are standing in line hoping they will be able to get in to the bathroom before the lights dim or the halftime ends.

That came to a head (so to speak) back in 1998 when a group of women at a San Diego rock concert couldn't take the pain any longer and "liberated" the men's room and some boozed women claiming that he was "singed, speck, cash-bar-raised, distraught and (being) visited" by the women's press.

The courts, all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court, threw the book and his hopes to a million hells (into (perhaps) the appropriate receptacle, but "Pussygate," brought the design law into focus.

Architects now realize that, statistically, it tends to take women a little longer to get to a restroom than those who don't have to fool around with pants, hose, and some of the inequities have been erased.

And, speaking of inequities, I am happy to announce that the long-awaited public Dade City restrooms, about which I have been writing in cross-gendered agony for years, are about to be completed.

They will be gender-specific, but baby steps are better than no steps at all.



With her daughter missing for more than two years, Mildred Young worries that Diane Augat — who was diagnosed as being manic-depressive — may have been killed.

Mother clings to hope for missing daughter

■ Detectives have talked to more than 100 people about Diane Augat's case; a tip last month led to a dead end.

By TAMARA LUSH
Times Staff Writer

HUDSON — For more than two years, Mildred Young has allowed herself to hope. Hope that her daughter, Diane Augat, still is alive.

Hope that the authorities will find wherever cut Augat's finger off and throw it on the side of U.S. 19.

in April 1998 will be over. "A part of me is gone," Young said. "I never accepted she was dead."

Officially, Augat is classified as a "missing person" with the Pasco County Sheriff's Office.

Augat, then 40, was reported missing on Good Friday, April 10, 1998. A week later, her finger was found. About a week after that, a bag of her neatly folded clothes was found in an Odessa convenience store's outdoor freezer case.

Sheriff's detectives have talked to more than 100 people and investigated several leads, said spokesman Jim Powers, including one tip last month that turned out to be a dead end.

"There really has been a tremendous amount of work that has gone into this case," Powers said.

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On this day, they are thankful



ABOVE: Sid Gross, the corps sergeant major of the Salvation Army of west Pasco, talks with Charles Agey of New Port Richey, left, while Betty Cringdaff finishes her meal at the Center of Hope in Port Richey, where more than 40 volunteers helped deliver the holiday feast. AT RIGHT: Volunteers from left, Arnette Scastry, 9, Tania Akhina, 14, Paru Mehta, 13, and Nitya Lingam, 14, serve plates during the Thanksgiving dinner at the Salvation Army center.

Photos by CARRIE PRATT

■ About 220 people share a traditional Thanksgiving meal, served by a group of doctors and their families at the Salvation Army.

By TAMARA LUSH
Times Staff Writer

PORT RICHEY — Pat Hasee has just enough income to pay her basic bills, rent, utilities, car.

"The grocery bill is always cut back," the 49-year-old disabled veteran said. "I eat mostly every day, Hasee enters at the Salvation Army, just down the street from her apartment. Thanksgiving was no exception.

Even though she admits life is sometimes tough, on Thursday Hasee said she has much to be thankful for.

She got out of the hospital on Wednesday, after suffering chest pains, and on Thursday, she ate a Thanksgiving meal with friends and family at the Salvation Army's Center of Hope on Washington Street. "I know God provides for us," she said. "God opened this door for us to eat."

Hasee was one of about 220 people who ate a traditional meal of turkey, stuffing and pie at the Salvation Army.

More than 40 people volunteered to serve meals, including a group of local doctors and their families.

The doctors are members of the American Association of Physicians from Southeast Asia. The association is a charitable group with more than 500 members in the Tampa Bay area. Each Thanksgiving, said Dr. Marjorie Bartel, the group sponsors a turkey dinner for an organization such as the Salvation Army.

Betty Cringdaff, 45, said eating a meal at the Salvation Army is a welcome change from eating in her truck, which is her only home at the moment.

"It gives me a good, hot meal," she said. "It fills an empty spot. You won't be near as hungry when you go to bed."

Explorer alumnus becomes officer

■ Derrick Doty's interest in law enforcement began when he joined the Youth Explorer program.

By BRADY DENNIS
Times Staff Writer

DADE CITY — Derrick Doty has grown used to the graveyard shift. He has worked evenings at McDonald's, as a manager at Papa John's pizza and as a security guard. He worked nights for a year as a dispatcher at the Dade City Police



Dade City Police Officer Derrick Doty, 22, is the first police Youth Explorer to join the department. Doty says the Explorer is what made him want to become an officer by showing him what an officer does on a daily basis.

Department. And these days, he patrols the streets as an officer for the department. From 11 p.m. to 7 a.m., of plain.

"It's not that bad," Doty said. "You just have to sleep when you can. And if you don't remember to bring something to eat at night, you're not

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Four years after woman's killing, trial set to begin

■ The state plans to pursue the death penalty if the accused pizza deliveryman is found guilty in the August 1996 slaying.

By CHASE SQUIRES
Times Staff Writer

DADE CITY — More than four years and three months after 26-year-old Laura Lynn Rombers was found murdered on a Land O'Lakes street, Moody and his legal team, the man accused of raping her and slaying her throat is scheduled to go on trial for his life Monday.

Michael Peter Fitzgerald, 38, of Spring Hill, is charged with first-degree murder in the Aug. 15, 1996, attack.

His case has been handled by three attorneys and has been subject to repeated hearings on everything from DNA evidence to witness identification. But both the prosecutor and defense attorney said this week that

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