

Mblem

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Ed Williams' Christmas Party
Local Gathering News
by Ed Williams

Folks, this is likely to be my last Christmas party, since I am probably going to be moving to a retirement community sometime next year. So I hope this will be a well-attended one. It will be on Saturday evening, December 16 from about 6:30 on. It is a social gathering, with no speaker, no program, and no kitty. I always advise people NOT to eat before coming. The "regulars" can tell you why. In 25 years, I don't recall ever running out of food, and I try to serve a variety of good stuff. The only thing I don't serve is desserts. I ask that anyone who is so inclined bring a dessert. It is NOT an obligation. You will find several types of wine, beer, soft drinks, and juices. Any questions? See Event Listings (back of the calendar page) for address, directions and contact information.

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- Note 1:** "Let's Discuss" & "Chapel Hill Brunch" are on hiatus for December for the holiday.
Note 2: Looking for bridge players. See contact information on the back of the calendar page.
Note 3: Chapel Hill Brunch moves to Holiday Inn in January, on 15-501 by-pass. See below.
Note 4: Speaker Seeker resigns. See article on P. 4.

Chapel Hill Brunch Report
reported by Shiangtai Tuan

In the past weeks a few people had sort of an informal discussion about the location of CH Brunch. October Chapel Hill Brunch was enjoyed by four people, including Betsy who was new to the C H Brunch. As Ed put it, "During our pleasant conversation on many subjects, the question arose of a new location for the brunch." He also said that he had visited the newly and vastly remodeled restaurant/bar part of the Holiday Inn (on Fordham Drive - 15-501 by-pass). He found that there is a place where we could sit in which tables could be moved together if needed. There is a breakfast buffet served until 12:00, for \$8. There is no parking problem.

The Holiday Inn is on the side of Chapel Hill that is close to Durham and to Raleigh, convenient for people in the greater Triangle area. We have used it before till it changed its hours. It is time to go back there again.

Since the fourth Saturday in December is too close to the Holidays, the December Chapel Hill Brunch is canceled and January one is moved to this new address at the old time, 11:00 AM.

Attention: Still looking for a Chapel Hill Brunch contact. Please contact this editor if interested.

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *Bridge, Anyone?* P.0
- *Holiday Party Time*, — This page.
- *Lots of Notices*. — Here
- *Winners?* — Page 2
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- *Want to Be a Seeker?* — P. 4
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Space for rent: \$0.00 per square inch.

Put your for hire, hiring, for sale, wanting, for rent ... ads here. Put your ideas in here. Put it in a corny way, this is your garden, make best use of it.

Winners and Losers

by David Skaar

The 2006 elections are now past. At least they're past when this will see print. They're still in the future as I write this. I should note that I'm writing this on a PDA using the handwriting recognition feature. It may not be very efficient but it is entertaining. I may not know the exact results of the election but I can predict some of the results with near certainty. This election was a devastating blow to all that is good and right about America. The winners hate the poor, the working class, the middle class, the self made millionaires, teachers, students, babies, retirees, unwed mothers, traditional families, intellectuals, Wall Street, Detroit, Hollywood, industry, the environment, farmers, religion, atheists, Capitalism, universal health care, cat people, dog people, your beliefs, your freedoms, you, themselves, the weak force, the strong force, the grand unified theory, and the curvature of space time.

The winners won and the losers lost because the voters recognized the importance of this election, understood the message, saw through the baloney, made the right decision, and saved the country. The voters also fell for the usual lies, slanders, half-truths, and voted the country down the tubes. And anyway, the election was being manipulated by the left, the right, big oil, Greenpeace, the FBI, CIA, KGB, EOC, and PTA, as well as the Illuminati, the Grays, the Illinois Nazis, and Ernest and Julio Gallo.

As a result, the world is saved, the ozone hole just got bigger, the economy is the best ever, all our jobs are being outsourced to Tasmania, freedom of expression is secured, the Bill of Rights has been shredded, pot will be legalized, imported beer will be criminalized, our children won't be able to read, the American educational system will be the envy of the world, the criminals will be reformed, the criminals will be wrongly executed, America will conquer the rest of the world and they'll hate it, the rest of the world will conquer America and we'll love it, half of all marriages will end in divorce, the other half in death, Microsoft Windows will crash, squirrels

will run in front of cars when they don't need to, razor blades will be sharp and cut people, fire will be hot and burn people, and seven out of eight kids will lose in each race at every swim meet for the next two years.

I'm just guessing, of course. The real things said will probably be much meaner, and probably equally accurate. I can also safely predict that I lost every race that I was in (remember, I declared myself a write-in candidate for everything). I would like to thank everyone who voted for me, and if you didn't, I don't blame you, it's not like I did what it takes to get elected. I didn't say mean things (true or otherwise) about other people in public, I didn't put signs at all the stoplights and then 'forget' to take them back after the election (I think that's called littering), or on the median of the interstate (I think that's trespassing, and stupid too), and I didn't do any phone or e-mail spamming. If only there was a way to point out to all the voters all the annoying things I didn't do, I might have done better.

The sorts of things that get said and done during a campaign remind me of Hanlon's and Godwin's Laws, which you may recall, I mentioned in my campaign statement and promised to deal with later. Hanlon's Law (possibly also known as Heinlein's Law, as Robert Heinlein is believed to have first stated it) is special case of Occam's Razor, regarding making unnecessary and over-complicated assumptions. Specifically, Hanlon's Law states, "Never attribute to malice that which can be adequately explained by stupidity." I think that's a pretty safe explanation for most of the things that are said and done around election time.

Godwin's Law is also applicable to the caliber of political repartee that we are usually subjected to. Godwin's Law is a creation of the early days of internet arguments (circa 1990), and states, "As an online discussion grows longer, the probability of a comparison involving Hitler or Nazis approaches one." An assumed corollary is that the discussion must then end, and whoever invoked Hitler or Nazis loses. It seems that the anonymity of fighting with people you'll never have to meet face-to-face results in great courage and poor judgement,

and results in people saying things that they would hopefully not normally say (unless they host a late-night talk show). Godwin created and promoted his theory in an attempt to get people to realize how egregious the invoking of Nazis was getting, and it succeeded reasonably well. These days, people who are aware of Godwin's Law are very careful to avoid it, and even any appearance of approaching it. In many cases, the suggestion that an argument is approaching the "Godwin" point will cool it off, assuming that anyone involved is still capable of reasonable behavior.

Now, it seems that some people have never experienced the sort of pointless argument that Godwin was referring to, so I will now try to simulate one for your edification. This may be a little more highbrow than the average online posts.

UncleFesterFan: Look, The Munsters stole all its storylines from the Addams Family, it's obvious.

GrandpaRocks: The Munsters actually had distinct personalities, and each was able to carry a storyline. The Addams Family had Gomez and Fester just acting goofy, and everyone else was just filling a spot. There was no distinction, and no character development.

UncleFesterFan: The Munsters were just old monster movie characters made stupid, with one running joke, that they thought Marilyn was ugly. How'd they get into the US, anyway? They're probably illegal immigrants.

GrandpaRocks: They were loyal Americans, they supported the war effort. Gomez was propping up fascist regimes, he owned property in the Soviet Union! (Author's note: Can you see where this is going?)

UncleFesterFan: Gomez was no Commie! He bought that land before the revolution. Which side of the war effort were the Munsters on? If Grandpa was from Transylvania, that was a Nazi possession. Grandpa was probably a saboteur working for Hitler!

And that's it, game over. Everyone enjoy the election aftermath, and assuming that civilization doesn't collapse before next month, I'll be back with some topics that actually involve logical thinking.

PROCTOR'S PODIUM by Ellen Muratori, Proctor Coordinator

The month of October, publicizing MTD (Mensa Testing Day), seems to complete the Testing Year for Mensa. And, in Mensa of Eastern North Carolina, our proctors have been at it throughout the year, volunteering their time and driving expense towards the growth of M.E.N.C.

Here is the record: For 2006, we tested a total of 95 prospects.

In Apex, (Wake County library) we held evening and Saturday sessions amounting to 31 attendees for the year. In Greensboro (eve and Sat. sessions), total 24. Durham 11; Fayetteville 10; Wilmington 5. Greenville, Jacksonville, New Bern, together, 6. Culture Fair testing for 8 persons.

Let's give a rousing cheer to those volunteers who responded to my call back in May, 2004, when I proposed to develop a viable Testing Program for MENC. They deserve a hearty "thank you" for the commitment, training, and their perseverance in bringing this program to fruition.

In alphabetical order (the proctors and the areas they serve): Chris Barnett, Wilmington; Joli Brooks, Jacksonville (thanks for the training of Brenda Stewart in New Bern), Peter Chiodo, Fayetteville; Cherie Ernest, Apex; Fran Greenstein, Apex; Joan Kramer, Greensboro; Audrey Lambert, Durham; Jay Parr, Greensboro; Brenda Stewart training for Greenville. And of course, myself! I slip in where needed.

Again, many thanks to all of you.

Halloween in Vanceboro By Shiangtai Tuan

Last time I went to Vanceboro, I remembered that it was a left turn to get out of the highway. This time it was a right turn. How confusing. Finally, I realized it was not my bad memory. They were different highways. I missed Nina's last party. So the last time I went, it was before US 64 was finished. Was it that long ago? It is much better a drive now.

Nina has always given good parties. She would go out of the way to give us a little extra. Once she was called to duty at work when she was to have us for a party. She did not cancel the party. Instead, 15 or 20 of us had a ball without her in her house, consuming the fancy food she catered. This time, she made several dishes herself and actually had the chance to spend time at home with us.

Last time we had a gathering there, it was just after the hurricane and flooding. Her farm was still "in shock." We saw the water mark halfway up the wall in her barn. Her animals had to be rescued. This time we got to meet most of the animals. Correct me Nina. Did you say there were 32 dogs? Some were inside, some outside and the old couple simply lying around enjoy being part of the family. Some live with the sheep, protecting them. Yes, I got that right. Shepherd dogs run "around" the flock of sheep making threatening gesture to "ward" them. However, the Anatolians walk "among" them to protect them in case of danger.

In addition to sheep, there were also goats, horses, and donkeys. Some how it reminded me of the days our family lived

by Yangtze River in Si Chuan Province. It was the war time when we were trying to get away from the invading Japanese. We had a house sort of away from a small village. We had roosters, hens and it was fun for a kid like me to go collect chicken eggs. We were city slickers living there temporarily but father bought some different animals at different times. Once we had a few mountain goats. It was amazing to see the new born kids standing up immediately after birth. They knew to respect their elders. They always knelt down before getting milk from their mom.

A Poem

written after Reba killed a mouse
by Sharon Ochsman

This Morning At My House...
As I got out of bed this morning
Over there, without warning,
I saw a leaf upon the floor,
At least I thought it was before...
I turned it over with my cane,
(Sometimes disability's a gain)
Not a leaf beside my bed,
But a little mousie's head instead.
A little bit of fur and fluff
A bit of blood,
She did her stuff.
Reba's now five times three,
But this morning there was a mouse-a-cree.



COORDINATOR'S CORNER

by Ellen Muratori

With not much to say, this report started out with a humdrum..."When the holiday season is upon us, blah, blah..." But Saturday Night at the cafeteria brought a turn-around of events. The place was umpteenth-layers-thick with rows of people who had attended a special Olympics event in High Point. The incoming mini-buses, the SUVs, were packed with hungry mobs; we did a hasty turn-about and (led by Tom Tyson, suggested by Max and Cathy Harless, seconded by Melinda Kite), headed for a nearby Remington Grill. A notice of the move, stuck just outside the cafeteria door, brought Kay Bishop, Rick Tolley, and Robert Jones to our table. A discussion ensued. Yes, the Remington could be suitable, IF we could get sufficient tables. The food was OK, IF one doesn't mind portions of french fries that defied gravity. And the Final Answer is...We'll continue at the Cafeteria, but for overflow considera-

tions, there's the Remington. (It suits the "Saturday Night Special" moniker.)

Games Night is always a big draw. Who can resist the clickety-clack of Perudo dice, or the slam-bop-whoosh of dominoes? For more quiet games, there's Carcassonne or Fluxx- but the participants' howling and jowling, make up for the noiseless game pieces. It always intrigues me how the odds of winning are in favor of She/He who keeps score!?!!

Come January and we hope to have a quirky (?) Movie Night in Greensboro scheduled (all the planning parts are not yet in place). We'd like to make it a residence (without animals, with handicap access), but might settle for ye ole Rec. Ctr., which has kitchen access for popcorn and hot cocoa! Which means it would have to be a Friday Night - maybe a local joint for discussion afterwards - who knows?? Input, suggestions? Please help.

(See e-mail address in the contact page at the inside back page.)

The Speaker Seeker Seeks a Seeker

by Shiangtai Tuan

This humble seeker is seeking a seeker who seeks.

In 1989, I had a Chinese Calligraphy Show in Ninth Street Bakery which is a month long display of my works and works by my students in Duke Continuing Studies (called Duke Continuing Education back then). A lady saw my show and approached me asking if I would give a demonstration to her group. Well, what was her group, I wondered. She said she was the Speaker Seeker for MENC, the Eastern North Carolina chapter of Mensa Club. I had heard of Mensa before and I had good impression of it. In the book cover of one of the Issac Asmov's Foundation series novels, Mensa was mentioned. It said that Asmov was an extraordinary man. He did several kind of scientific researches, wrote papers and book in scientific research as well as science fiction. While he wanted to relax for a while, he would go to the NYC Mensa club, have a coffee and discussion how to save the world with other Mensans. That was the highest form of intellectual activities that I could think of. In my imagination, there were men and women, young and old, wearing smoking jackets or something casual, sipping coffee and involving themselves in intellectual conversation. To give a demonstration of Chinese calligraphy to such a group is definitely an extreme honor.

Since I was also a member of the Triangle Area Calligrapher's Guild (for Western calligraphy), I invited then president Galia to go with me. We were met with a bunch of interesting people who showed great appreciation to what we had to tell them. They were very friendly and kind. We got along well. In the end, they asked if we would join their club. Well, I knew there was a special requirement in IQ so

I said I would if I could qualify. Since I did not have any "prior evidence" that I could use, I would have to take a test. I was relieved when I heard she and the then LocSec, Ellen, said there was a language independent IQ test I could take. However, they made their effort but could not find any information from the National Office. Since she happened to be a proctor also, she got the regular test from the National Office and gave me the test. In the Spring of 1990, I got a letter from the Mensa office telling me that I was in the 99 percentile and invited me to join the club which I did in April.

Ellen was not only the LocSec but also the newsletter editor. So, my first involvements with MENC were to go to Speaker Meetings and to go collate, fold, staple, and label the news letter - Mblem every month. Back then the Speaker Meetings were held in a condo club house in Cary. It was in the form of a potluck. The Speaker Seeker would invite someone to give a talk usually on a seasonal topic. For instance, I remember the spider webs she put in the club house in October for Halloween. I think it was that year we at MENC hosted our first RG. Ellen ran it smoothly. I remember my only assignment was to pick up a plateful of cookies someone made in Durham and carried it with me to Raleigh when I went. It was an enthusiastic bunch and I enjoyed working with them and enjoyed meeting many Mensans in that RG.

Not too long after that, our Speaker Seeker moved to Charlotte and we became Seekerless. Some of us talked about looking for a replacement. Since I knew quite a few people through my work and other activities, I volunteered to do the "seeking" for a few months until the club could find a permanent seeker.

— Conti. To P. 6, Seeks

THE UNIVERSE EXPANDING

by Gene McMahon

During my teen years and for a couple of decades thereafter, I devoted much time, besides to music and electronics, to studying such matters as Quantum Theory and Relativity Theory. These latter were fascinating ways to cull entirely fresh sensory information that our bodily sensory systems do not sense. I felt my perception opening upon a far larger universe. Besides the famous texts and papers on the above, I branched out to absorb supporting texts – statistics, tensor theory, gyroscopic theory and the like.

Among the concepts, I was captivated by Einstein's elevator "thought experiment," that is, a person in an elevator could not tell if he or she were at rest on the surface of our planet, or, otherwise, if he or she were someplace in outer space and the elevator were accelerating in the direction of the elevator's roof about 32 feet per second squared – just the same force we feel on our planet's surface. But Einstein was concerned with the bending of a beam of light coming through a small hole in the side of the elevator and beaming to a spot on the opposite side of the elevator. The beam must light some spot given no gravity or acceleration. And the spot should move exactly the same amount in the case of our gravity or that of the foregoing acceleration. Movement of the spot follows from the fact that light doesn't go from one side of the elevator to the other instantaneously, but requires the time equal to the speed of light divided by the distance from one side of the elevator to the other. The same concept applies to Einstein's most famous experiment demonstrating the "bending" of light from a star close to, but distinct from, the edge of our sun during an eclipse. Hypothesis confirmed!

But all these years it has puzzled me that this evidence that our planet was expanding faster and faster was universally ignored by our scientific community! Yes, experts conceded light's red shift across vast distances, the vaster the distance, the greater the shift. They chose to believe the universe was expanding, but at a constant rate. The idea that the WHOLE universe was expanding at an accelerating rate, including our planet, our other planets, our moon, our sun, light-waves, we ourselves, space itself, etc., etc., seems never to have penetrated their conventional wisdom.

But why shouldn't we think of space and everything in it, including us, as expanding faster and faster? It's now estimated that our moon is at least fifteen times farther away from our planet since its formation more than four billion years ago. Then the moon seemed gigantic in the night sky, causing tides on our ocean shores thousands of feet high as earthly water accumulated. The moon's pull triggered earthquakes and catastrophic geological strains. It was a bad time for lifekind. Recent evidence that our sunlight is gradually dimming suggests also that our sun is slowly retreating from us. Currently we attribute this to atmospheric pollution.

The evidence that our universe is expanding at an accelerating rate comes from a study of many 1-A supernovae. These exploding stars all create the same identity, because they explode for exactly the same reason. In particular, they explode emitting the same amount of light in all directions! Knowing this, and measuring how bright they are, we can estimate their distance. The measurement shows that the furthest 1-A supernovae are far dimmer than we expect from their spectral red shift. In other words, they are much farther away from us than we believed, and the dimmer they are, the faster they speed still farther away. Only accelerating expansion of our universe can explain this discrepancy. Q.E.D.

Note, given that our universe is expanding faster and faster, all past astral measurements proclaimed by our resident experts must be dead wrong! For example, suppose you measured the height of the Tower of Pisa by the speed of a dropped stone at ground level times the interval between dropping it and its arrival at ground level (assuming constant velocity): thereupon, the height of the Tower would measure far greater! Red shift introduces a similar error in our expanding universe. The actual measure is far greater!

I'll inject a thought: If everything in our universe expands at an accelerating rate, what happens if gargantuan stars grow so large their exterior expands at the speed of light? The speed of light shall not be exceeded in our known universe! Hypothesis: those huge stars must somehow correct themselves! Stars without tremendous spin, but having the "customary" ingredients, become 1-A supernovae when their periphery expansion approaches light speed, thus collapsing to a new state of matter nominally expanding at light speed -- in other words, a black hole.

Think of it this way: It is your duty and obligation as a member of MENC to write something for this news letter.

I suggest only that our universe is much weirder than what we've been led to expect.

Conti. From P. 4, Seeks

I had connections to physicists from my degree work, to computer science people from work. I was also the Duke contact to NC Supercomputing Centers. Through my hobbies I also knew people in music, photography, calligraphy, and bike riding. I thought if I could get one person from each of those connections it would last enough time before MENC could get a real Speaker Seeker. Little did I know that I was to be the “temp” for more than ten years.

Back then, as I said, the Speaker Meeting was preceded by a potluck dinner in a club house. Several of the members felt that the burden of having to make a dish discouraged people from participating. Also, the atmosphere in a club house with a few rows of chairs and a portable black board was uninteresting. “Who wants to be lectured on in a class room in a Saturday evening after hard work all week?” So when I took over the Seekership, with the help of an “advisory council”, we made some changes. Instead of a high school classroom flavor, we moved to individual members’ homes. Each month, the Speaker Seeker, that was “temporarily” yours truly, would not only seek for a speaker but also seek for the kindness of a host. I was truly overwhelmed by the generosity of many hosts. Don’t laugh at me. Since I grew up in the time of Japanese invasion, I never saw my grandfather’s house.

In America, I have either been a poor graduate students or a university employee. If not for the kindness of the members who open their homes for the Speaker Meetings, I would never have the chance to see the interior of such beautiful houses. Of course, not all hosts lived in mansions. No matter how big or how small the living rooms were, it was the warmth that moved me, made the participants felt welcome, and made the Speaker Meetings successful. Since it was the only once a month “meeting” designed for all members, I jokingly called it the Local Gathering (LG), playing on the Mensa names Regional Gathering (RG) and Annual Gathering (AG). Later, I found out that other groups did use the same name. So, LG and Speaker Meeting became synonymous. Hopefully, instead of the special interest gatherings like dinners or games, this can be THE meeting for MENC every month. To live up to this purpose, we also combined LG with Ed William’s annual Christmas Party in December (see article on P. 1) and some other annual events for all members. We even had “annual general membership” a few times with no speaker at all.

Some samples of themes are: wine tasting, rock garden, artificial languages, death penalty, belly dance, computer created movies (before George Lucas), fencing ... just to name a few. In the second and last RG hosted by MENC which Nancy ran smoothly and successfully, we had some of the speakers back for the workshops and lectures.

There have not been all glories. Before each meeting, I have always had the worry of “Suppose you start a revolution but no one shows up.” Exactly, what if no one showed up! I remember once when I recommended increasing activities on the calendar, one of the ExComm members said: “Why bother, if any one, you should know that the Mensans are the most apathetic.” She might be right. Some one also suggested to require RSVP to guarantee attendance. However, I don’t want to burden the members with the thought that they have to commit themselves with a definite reply days ahead of time.. What if some one forgot to call in. What if some one decided to come at the last moment. What if someone did not want to be tied down by the bond of a promise? I wanted to give the members the most freedom and comfort when they came to LGs. Well, the trade off was the anxiety before the meeting and the possible embarrassment to face the invited speakers if only a few members or, heaven forbid, no one showed up.

One other draw back for me is that I felt tied down every month on the third weekend. I missed many shows, concerts, parties, even travel opportunities because of it. Of course, this was only me. I recommend the future Speaker Seekers not to tie themselves down with this restriction. You may schedule the LG to another day of the month; arrange something that you don’t have to attend, or simply not show up.

I have also heard the criticism that the Speaker Meetings had not been of real significance or relevance (paraphrasing). That shows that we at MENC is truly in need of a real Speaker Seeker, not a temp that has substituted in this position too long.

We have also started some tradition so not all twelve months need to be filled with new programs. For instance, there is usually a Chinese New Year's party in February; a St. Patrick's day Celebration in March; a Penguin Day in June; a Confucius Birthday party in September; a Halloween party in October; and a Christmas Party in December. Of course, some of these may subject to change or may need new hosts.

It has been quite a while since I have been a Seeker. I started even before Harry Potter was made a Seeker, or, say, even before Harry Potter was born. It is time for some one else to give it a try. It is time for me to end the temporary tenure and give the position to a real one. Whoever interested to be a Speaker Seeker, please contact any of the ExComm members or me. See contact information at the inside back page.

Seen some movies lately? How did you like them?

Like sports? Tell us what you enjoy best and why.