

You can lead a horse to water, but can you get a fish to catch itself?

Scientists are trying to train fish to swim into a net when they hear a tone signaling feeding time.

"It sounds crazy, but it's real," said Simon Miner, a researcher at the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, Mass.

If it works, it would allow bass to be released into the ocean to grow to market size and then have them return to be harvested.

We've heard of dumb crooks, but here's one that leaves us dumbfounded.

A thief walked into a Chicago muffler shop and when he was told the safe was locked and no one had the combination, he left his cellphone number and asked them to call him when their boss returned with the code.

So they did, but when Ruben Carate returned, cops were waiting.

A British couple whose \$2 million house got flooded have been unable to repair the damage and return home because endangered newts may have taken up residence.

This has left owners John and Margie Histed dumbfounded.

"I know it's the law, but it's very frustrating and bordering on the ridiculous that the fate of newts takes precedence over humans," Margie said.

It was like the 2000 presidential election all over again — except in Australia they don't need the Supreme Court to settle things.

Residents of the Outback town of Winton chose its new mayor by drawing a name from a trash can after the vote ended in a 423-to-423 tie.

In the end, Ed Warren beat out Butch Lenton. Provincial law allows for such ties to be broken by drawing a name or flipping a coin.

In other electoral shenanigans, Zimbabwe showed once again why free elections are really the way to go.

Goons aligned with President Robert Mugabe's political party forced opposition supporters to tear down posters for their candidates and eat them.

Mugabe has ruled the moribund country thuggishly for nearly three decades.

Lukas I. Alpert, Wire Services

# HI-RISE HELL FIRE



William Miller



Daniel Shapiro

**LOWER E. SIDE DRAMA:** A firefighter carries a child from the Grand Street blaze last night, as other rescuers tend to one of 20 victims.

## Victim fights for life

By TATIANA DELIGIANNAKIS and KELLY MAGEE

An elderly man was fighting for his life early today following a fire that injured 20 people in a lower Manhattan high-rise.

The 83-year-old victim went into cardiac arrest when he was pulled from the blaze at 460 Grand St., sources said.

Paramedics were able to revive him in an ambulance on the way to Bellevue Hospital, where he was listed in critical condition.

A woman was critical at Beth Israel Hospital, while seven other civilians and 30 firefighters sustained minor injuries.

Camillo Correia, 31, who owns the third-floor apartment where the fire burned for about 90 minutes, said he was returning home to the empty apartment when he saw what was happening.

"I looked up and I couldn't believe my apartment was on fire," he said. "The flames were shooting out the window."

As smoke rose up through the building, residents panicked.

"We couldn't breathe. The hall-

way was pitch black," said a resident who lives on the 21st floor.

"We put the kids in the bedroom and we put wet towels on their faces. We have one who's asthmatic, and we were afraid."

Several people were trapped in stairwells, despite being told to stay inside their apartments, fire officials said.

Those who did venture out had a tough time.

"You couldn't see. Period. The smoke was that thick," said a man who lives on the 23rd floor.

Naomi Peña and her two young children live on the 18th floor.

"The smoke started going through the apartment," she said. "I had to take the kids to the room in the back and stand by the windows open."

They were evacuated about 30 minutes later.

Peña's 7-year-old daughter, Elisha, said "It was real black and scary and dark going down the stairs. It was hard to breathe in there I'm glad we got out."

Additional Reporting by C.J. Sullivan and Frank Rosario

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## Bungle sets fruit-loopy thief free

By LAURA ITALIANO

Raul De Jesus Jr. — a cocaine addict with the unnerving habit of snacking on his burglary victims' fresh fruit before making off with their valuables — should have been sentenced to 10 years in prison yesterday.

Prosecutors were ready. The defense lawyer and judge were ready. The paperwork was in order.

But when his name was called in Manhattan Supreme Court, De Jesus was nowhere to be found. He had been mistakenly set free from an upstate prison 31 days before and vanished.

Equally startling is that officials hadn't known that the coke-addled fruit burglar was even a fugitive — until court officials told them yesterday, after discovering that the sentencing's guest of dishonor was missing.



**RAUL DE JESUS**  
Was set to get 10 years.

"As soon as the clerk told me this, I was stunned," De Jesus' lawyer, Bryan Kosnoski, said later.

"Stunned. I've never heard of this ever happening before. He just saved himself 10 years."

But it later turned out he

saved himself only a couple of hours.

De Jesus, 37, who has a burglary record stretching to the mid-'90s., turned himself in late last night, said state correction spokesman Erik Kriss.

De Jesus was in Mid-State Correction Facility, near Utica, finishing up his term for a previous Manhattan burglary spree, when DNA and other evidence linked him last year to another spree — five more apartment burglaries in the West Village and East Village from the summer of '05.

The DNA was from cherry pits he'd discarded at one of the crime scenes.

De Jesus typically snacked and burgled simultaneously, officials said, and had freaked out another victim by leaving the little green tops of her previously intact

strawberries scattered around the ransacked apartment.

On Feb. 8, De Jesus was transported down from Mid-State in shackles so he could plead guilty to the '05 spree.

Given his lengthy criminal history, Justice Bonnie Wittner ordered he be held without bail until he could be sentenced to 10 years in prison.

But when De Jesus' prison term from the earlier spree ended on Feb. 25, state correction officials let him go.

"It appears he should have, at that point, been turned over to the custody of New York City Corrections," Kriss said.

"That should have happened Feb. 25. Our inspector general is investigating why that didn't happen, and we'll take appropriate action."

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## 'Pollute' suit vs. Columbia

The owner of a warehouse in the crosshairs of Columbia University's expansion plans filed suit yesterday, calling the school's designs an environmental disaster in the making.

Nick Sprayregen, whose Tuck-It-Away storage facility sits on Broadway between 130th and 131st streets, believes that constructing a 2 million-square-foot "bathtub" surrounding the new buildings' foundations, similar to the one at Ground Zero, could be dangerous.

His lawyer, Norman Siegel, said a major storm could flood the tub, causing chemicals from Columbia labs to contaminate the area.

Columbia spokeswoman La-Verna Fountain called the environmental review process "rigorous and comprehensive."

Austin Fenner