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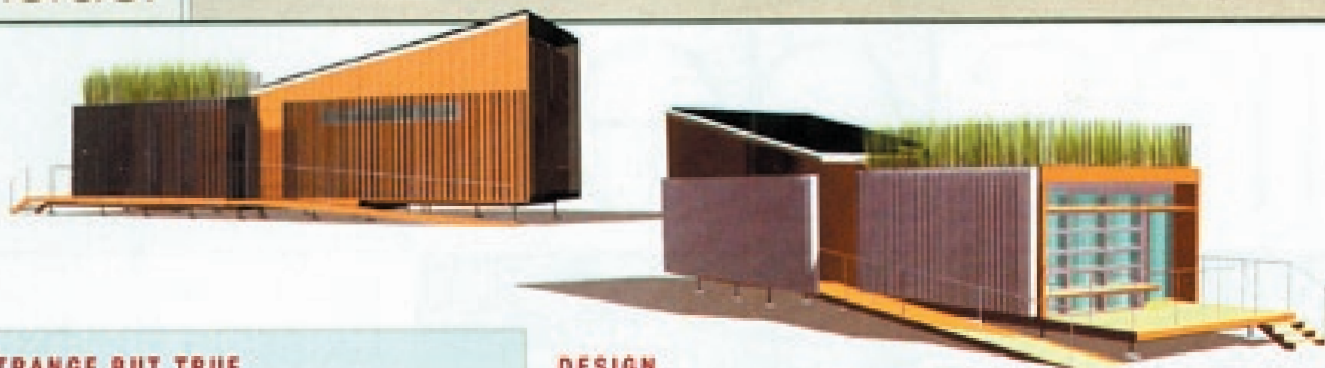
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STRANGE BUT TRUE

People ask the darndest things...

Ever get an inquiry that is so bizarre or unbecoming that it causes you to stop in your tracks and tilt your head to the side? Or one so silly you have to cover your mouth to stifle a giggle? It seems we all have, and we've got the questions to prove it. Here are some of the wackiest asked of some well-known establishments around the state. —Stephanie Adams

Save the Bay

- "What should I do about the strange odor emanating from my toilet?"
- "Can you do something about my neighbor's unsightly above-ground swimming pool?"

Rhode Island Convention Center

- "I am planning a meeting in New York. What part of Long Island are you on?"
- "Do you hold conventions?"

Providence Preservation Society

- "It is after the Feast of Epiphany and my neighbor still has his Christmas decorations up. Can you do anything about it?"

Audubon Society of Rhode Island

- "Do birds grow their wings back?"
- "Does there have to be snow to cross-country ski?"

Rhode Island Public Transit Authority

- Caller: "When's the next bus?"
- Customer service operator: "Where are you?"
- Caller: "My girlfriend's house."

Rhode Island Bar Association

- "How often do you hold your annual meeting?"

Providence Children's Museum

- "Is the dragon on the roof real?"
- "Do fish ever stop moving?"
- "Why can't we just shoot all the trash into outer space?"

Roger Williams Zoo

- "I'd like to give my wife a really fantastic birthday present. She really wants to swim with the polar bear, can we do that?"
- "I didn't realize the alligator I bought would get this big — can you take it?"

DESIGN

House proud

RISD students build an environmentally friendly house of the future.

Imagine never again getting any utility bills. And still enjoying all the modern creature comforts we've grown to expect, from a washer and drier to a TV and computer. It sounds like some sort of happy — very unlikely — mix-up, but if a group of RISD students have their way, it may be a trend of the future. As part of the Solar Decathlon, a competition sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy, the group is designing, building and decorating a one-story 800-square-foot house that runs entirely on solar power.

RISD is the only art school out of the eighteen engineering colleges that have entered the competition, which will be held this fall on the Mall in D.C. The students are, true to the rules of a decathlon, judged in ten areas, from architecture and lighting to hot water and appliances. The houses must be livable by today's standards, which means enough solar power has to be generated to, among other things, allow for two average-length showers each morning and to run a TV for six hours a day and a computer for eight.

RISD is relying on many of the school's academic departments, incorporating furniture, textiles, industrial design, to create a winner. Early plans indicate that the house will be an urban dwelling, rely on louvers to help regulate the interior temperature, and have a roof garden.

The ultra-efficient module will be built on South Water Street in Providence (across from Neath's), so the public can chart its progress. The shell is set to be up by early June, with work on the interior taking place throughout the summer, before being transported in parts to D.C. It's there that the local team hopes to get their moment in the sun — and, more important, inspire a new kind of sustainable design. —Lisa E. Harrison

TRAVEL

First-class or shotgun

Who said road trips were cheap? With gas prices at all-time highs and reasonable airfare easier to come by, we figured the cost and time for fun getaways this spring — from chic Orange County (a.k.a. "The O.C.") to historic (and nearby) Washington D.C. —Meghan O'Connor



DESTINATION	DRIVE *		FLY **	
	cost	time	cost	time
Chicago	\$188	14 hr., 47 min.	\$143	1 hr., 45 min.
Montreal	\$78	6 hr., 5 min.	\$249	3 hr., 52 min.
Nashville	\$218	17 hr., 17 min.	\$163	3 hr., 33 min.
New York City	\$35	3 hr., 4 min.	\$359	59 min.
Orange County	\$582	45 hr., 12 min.	\$203	6 hr., 25 min.
Tampa	\$264	21 hr., 33 min.	\$115	5 hr., 18 min.
Washington D.C.	\$80	6 hr., 44 min.	\$103	1 hr., 31 min.

* Gas costs based on \$1.95 per gallon/21 miles per gallon, roundtrip
 ** Lowest monthly airfare available at travelocity.com as of press time

