

Editor's notes:

February 2006 21-6

This month's name is derived from "februa," the name of a Roman festival of expiation or atonement, which was held during February. The festival's name itself comes from "februo," meaning "I purify by sacrifice."

Groundhog Day, February 2 -- The theory behind this ancient tradition holds that if the groundhog sees his shadow on this day, which is halfway between the start of winter and the start of spring, six weeks of winter will follow; if he doesn't, look for an early spring. The predictor is likely to be a male because males emerge from hibernation sooner than females.

Canada's Winterlude, February 3-19 -- This three-week-end festival in Ottawa was founded by the National Capital Commission in 1979 to celebrate the northern climate and culture. Activities include skating on Rideau Canal, snow and ice competitions, and winter sports demonstrations.

Valentine's Day, February 14 -- According to Unity Marketing, Valentine's Day is the third most popular holiday for gift giving (after Christmas and Mother's Day). Some 68 percent of women buy presents, spending an average of \$78; 72 percent of men are givers, spending an average of \$171.

Read to Your Child Day, February 14 -- Today is a good opportunity to enjoy the time-honoured tradition of sharing a good book with your kids. Due to many screen distractions, many families have drifted away from traditional bed-time stories. But if you pick the right books, your children will love the quality time together.

International Mother Language Day, February 21 -- The United Nations sponsors this day to recognize linguistic and cultural diversity. The U.N. says that half of the world's 6,000 languages are endangered, meaning that only 30 percent of the children in a region are still taught their parents' tongue. Canada is officially bilingual, with 25 percent of its residents speaking French.



Mardi Gras, February 28 -- This year was already primed to be special because it will be the 150th anniversary of Mardi Gras parades in New Orleans. City officials have vowed to continue the tradition this year despite the catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina, to symbolize the region's recovery.

Valentine's Day Trivia

Cupid, the mischievous winged cherub that symbolizes Valentine's Day, was the son of Venus, the Roman goddess of love. His name comes from "cupido," Latin for desire. (In Greek mythology, Cupid is called Eros, and is the son of Aphrodite.) According to myth, anyone hit by Cupid's arrow will fall in love with the next person he or she sees. As a young man, Cupid fell in love with a beautiful mortal, Psyche. Because he was a god, she was forbidden to look at him. Her sisters persuaded her to peek, and Cupid disappeared. Cupid appealed to the gods, and Psyche was made immortal, allowing them to marry.

The First Valentine's Day Candy Box



Richard Cadbury designed the first chocolate candy box in 1868, featuring a painting of his daughter holding a kitten. In 1873, Cadbury introduced the first heart-shaped candy box.

Americans and Canadians spend more than \$1.1 billion each Valentine's Day on candy, making it the fourth biggest holiday for confectionery sales. A Gallup survey found that most women prefer chocolate to flowers on Valentine's Day.

Sealed with an X

The tradition of sending kisses by writing Xs on a note dates back to the Middle Ages, when illiterate peasants would sign documents with an X. To emphasize their commitment to what they signed, they would kiss the mark. In time, the X and the kiss became interrelated, and today even literate people use the X to "X"press affection.

Scien-Test

Can you match the type of scientist with the area each specializes in?

- | | |
|------------------|--------------|
| 1. Herpetologist | a. animals |
| 2. Mycologist | b. water |
| 3. Meteorologist | c. weather |
| 4. Zoologist | d. maps |
| 5. Hydrographer | e. plants |
| 6. Cartographer | f. snakes |
| 7. Botanist | g. poisons |
| 8. Toxicologist | h. mushrooms |

Answers: 1f; 2h; 3c; 4a; 5b; 6d; 7e; 8g

A Novel Idea to Improve the Quality of Our Governments

How do you like the election results? Whichever party you rooted for, you probably didn't give much thought to what each member of Parliament ought to be paid.

What do you think of paying each MP \$1 million? Outrageous? Maybe. Maybe not!

One of my favourite economists, Thomas Sowell, has given this matter a lot of thought. And even though his remarks apply specifically to American politicians, his observations are no less on-target for their Canadian counterparts. Sowell writes: "The cost of paying every member . . . a million dollars a year is absolutely trivial compared to the vast amounts of the taxpayers' money wasted by cheap politicians doing things to get themselves re-elected."

"There is no point complaining about the ineptness, deception or corruption of government while refusing to do anything to change the incentives and constraints which lead to ineptness, deception and corruption."

"Whatever the problems faced by the country, the number one priority of elected officials is to get re-elected. Nothing does that better than handing out money from the public treasury."

Sowell goes on to suggest that in order to get highly skilled or intelligent people, or people with real-world experience to run, they have to be offered something substantial. Few people at the top of their profession are going to sacrifice their children's education or their ability to retire in comfort in order to run for Parliament. His answer is to pay these people substantially, but, to also limit their term in office, or at least waiting a period of several years before running again after completion of a limited term. This stricture would also apply to appointing retired MPs to run crown corporations, etc.

We don't usually editorialize in this newsletter but this election was too important to let pass without comment. If you have some pithy comments to share, send them our way.

The Best Beans

Beans are a great source of complex carbohydrates, fibre, protein, and minerals such as potassium, magnesium, and zinc. But they do have a reputation for causing gas. One way to address that problem is to gradually increase your intake of beans, so your body has a chance to adjust. Another is to select beans that are less likely to produce gas, such as black-eyed peas, large Lima beans, garbanzo beans, baby Limas, and great northern beans. More troublesome may be small white beans, pinto, black turtle beans, pink beans, and soybeans.

The Many Uses of Baking Soda

Bicarbonate of soda, better known as baking soda, can be used in dozens of ways around your house. It is a great substitute for other more expensive products. For example:

- Add 1/2 cup to the washing machine to help clean oil- or grease-stained clothing, or as a substitute for detergent.
- Use it as a scouring powder to clean your fridge, countertops, bathroom tile, sinks, etc. Rinse with clear water.
- Wash out thermoses and coolers with 3 tablespoons of soda dissolved in a quart of water.
- Use the same solution to wash glass or stainless steel coffee pots or soak hair brushes and combs.
- Polish silverware with dry soda on a damp cloth. Rub, rinse and dry.
- Run your dishwasher through its cycle with soda instead of soap for a good cleaning.
- Clean your drains by flushing 4 tablespoons of soda down the drain with hot water each week.
- Use soda as toothpaste -- sprinkle on a wet toothbrush.
- Treat insect bites, sunburn, or poison ivy by applying a paste of soda and water.

Winter Olympics, February 10-26

Turin, Italy will host the Winter Olympics this year. Twenty-five hundred athletes from 85 countries will compete in 84 events in various sports:

Biathlon -- a cross-country skiing and rifle marksmanship event.

Bobsleigh -- a two- or four-person sled in which participants ride sitting up.

Luge -- a one-person sled on which the athlete lies on his or her back and descends feet first.

Skeleton -- a one-person sled on which the athlete lies on his her stomach and descends head first.

Curling -- a game with brooms and a large granite stone (sort of an ice version of shuffleboard.)

Skating -- including figure skating and speed skating.

Skiing -- including ski jumping, Alpine and Nordic skiing, and cross-country.

Snowboarding and ice hockey are also on the agenda. Olympic volunteers and officials will number 2,500, and there will be 650 judges and referees. More than 10,000 journalists are expected to cover the games.

The first winter Olympics was held in 1924 in Chamonix, France. Two hundred and fifty-eight athletes (only 11 of whom were women) from 16 countries competed in 16 events.

Welcome, Jacquie Roberson!

We have a new customer service representative at Helix. Jacquie Roberson has begun working afternoons, helping us keep up with your calls for messenger and courier service. It will take Jacquie two or three weeks to learn all about our customers, but she will do her very best to carry out her duties with the dedication and efficiency you deserve.