

Break Time in the Army Corps of Engineers Mascot Lounge

by Con Chapman

The Army Corps of Engineers spent \$92,000 in federal stimulus money on costumes for mascots such as Bobber the Water Safety Dog.

Money Well Spent? by

Michael Grabell

Bobber in his new duds.

It's 9:45 a.m., and excuse me if I'm sneaking a peak at the clock every few seconds. I work for the Army Corps of Engineers, and it's not the most exciting job in the world. I look forward to our 10 a.m. coffee break the way private sector workers look forward to 5 p.m. on Fridays, but I have to endure the anticipation five days a week, plus lunch, afternoon breaks and rush hour, which begins for federal workers at 3 p.m. It eats away at you.



Face it, man—ranger chicks in Smokey the Bear hats dig mascots.

I look across the office at Buddy the Beaver's desk, and I can see he's doing the same thing. "You about ready?" I ask hopefully.

"I guess," he says. "I can process these Form ACE-103A's after break."

We get in the elevator and head down to the basement cafeteria we share with the General Services Administration, the outfit that's responsible for keeping the U.S. in tires, paper towels and other essential non-military items. If you ever want to make someone yawn, just say the words "government procurement"—it works like a sleeping potion.



Seamore the Sea Serpent

We spot Seamore the Sea Serpent, another Corps of Engineers mascot, sitting over in a corner at a table by himself. He's staring off into space, looking depressed.

"Hey good buddy," I say as we walk past on our way to the food, "save a seat for us okay?"

"Sure," he says. He sounds lost—even distraught, whatever that means.

We get our coffee and move down the line towards the cash register. "Those donuts look good," Buddy says.

"No thanks. I'm trying to lose some weight," I say, so I pick up a Columbo fruit-on-the-bottom strawberry yogurt.

"You're kidding yourself," Buddy says. "A container of that stuff has as many calories as a light beer."

"It makes me feel better, okay?"



“Whatever floats your boat,” he says as opts for the cheese danish. “Why do you want to lose weight—you look fine.”

“Everything I own is tight on me.”

“Maybe if they'd let us get in the water every now and then instead of sitting behind a desk all day we'd be in better shape.”

“Filing triplicate copies of storm water runoff permits is important too,” I say. You never know when a GS-4 is going to overhear you and bust you down to roadside trash collection.

We make our way over to Seamore's table and his disposition hasn't improved.

“How they hangin'?” I say with as jovial a tone as I can muster for someone who's got 1,298 days left to retirement, not that I'm counting or anything.

“Okay,” he says.

“The floggings will continue until morale improves,” Buddy says, but Seamore isn't in the mood for humor.

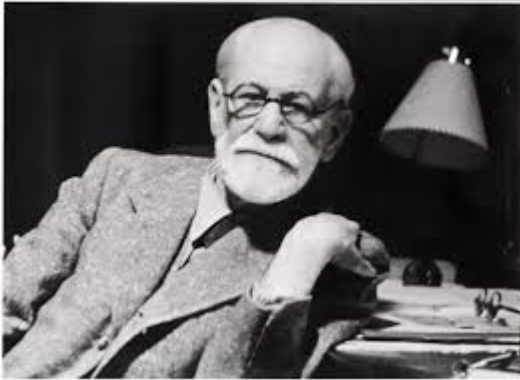
Buddy snacks on some Cool Ranch Elm Stix.

“Buck up, pal,” I say. “You get paid well to do important work—isn't that half of what makes life worth living?”

“What's the other half?” he asks.

“Wild freaky sex with a hot babe like Barbara Beaver in Coastal Zone Management,” Buddy says as his distaff counterpart walks past, her hindquarters swaying rhythmically, like a bough buoyed by a breeze, to wax poetic for just a second.

“I think he meant to say 'love,’” I say with a note of Puritanical reserve. As with all federal agencies, we are subject to a Dignity in the Workplace Policy. “That's what Freud said—love and work are the essential components of human happiness.”



Freud: "You keep using the word 'beaver.' That's not some kind of slip, is it?"

"Everything's okay on the homefront," Seemore says. "It's the work part that's got me down."

"Why?"

"The whole anti-government sentiment that's running rampant in America today," he says bitterly. "Those Tea Party types have no *idea* how hard my job is."

"You got that right," I say. "You play a vital role in keeping America's drunken lunk-headed Ski-doo drivers from killing themselves by crashing into Lake of the Ozarks cruise boats."

"Like the Larry Don?" Buddy asks.

S.S. Larry Don: The author once played bass guitar on the midnight cruise—try the Catfish Basket!

“On the nosey,” I say.

“Still,” Seamore says, “look at these little pills that are forming on the seat of my costume.”

“That’s going to happen with your cotton-poly blends,” Buddy says. “You could go with 100% natural fibers, but they wear out so fast.”

“I don’t see why the government can’t buy us new costumes,” Seamore says. “We’re men in uniform, just like the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines.”

I cluck my tongue with disapproval. “Seamore—you know the \$3.27 trillion dollars in stimulus money that your grandchildren . . .”

“ . . . and great-grandchildren,” Buddy adds.

“ . . . will be paying for has to be used first on critical public services.”

Perhaps I shouldn’t have put it that way. Seamore’s a proud sea serpent, and the color rushes into his face as he stands up slowly.

“You saying I’m not important? You saying stupid stuff like crumbling bridges . . .”



Federal Register (yawn)

“Actually, they didn’t spend any of it on bridges,” Buddy says. He keeps score when he goes to baseball games *and* when he reads the federal budget.

“ . . . or to create jobs in areas of high unemployment . . . ”

“Didn’t do that either.” Buddy again—not me. People are starting to look at us from other tables—I don’t want to get a reputation as some kind of small-government wingnut.

“ . . . are as important as a new costume for me every couple of years?” Seamore’s done, and he looks drained. His face is red, he’s all teary-eyed.

“Excuse me,” I hear someone say over my shoulder. I turn around and see Ray Hefnertz, career bureaucrat for the GSA. “Did you see today’s Federal Register?”

“No—what’s in it?” I ask.

“You guys are in for a \$92,000 costume upgrade in FY2012.”



Bobber says—use your noodle!

I can almost feel the load that's lifted off of Seamore's psyche by this news.

"Are you serious?" he asks, with a tone as hopeful as if a doctor's just emerged from an operating room where his mother's undergone emergency surgery.

"It's right there in black and white. You guys deserve it," he says, giving us a cornball "thumbs up."

"There—does that make you feel better?" I ask.

Seamore accepts a generic facial tissue—this *is* a government cafeteria—and wipes his eyes.

"This . . . this is why I went into public service," he says through sniffles.

"A crappy felt and foam mascot costume?" Ray asks, incredulous.

"Well, that and the pension."

