



What enquiring minds want to know

Special Holiday Edition



December 20th, 2002



## Don & Amy's Holiday Newsletter Returns !

Happy holidays! Its hard to believe that another year has already come and gone and the holiday season is upon us once again. Unfortunately, to the disappointment of many, last year was so busy that we never had the chance to publish the annual newsletter. However, this year with the extended time off that was so graciously provided me by Xerox s grand recovery plan, I suddenly have the time to invest in an extended newsletter. Amy and I dedicate this issue of the newsletter to the memory of our loved ones whom we lost last year.

## 2002

Other than getting laid off from Xerox, 2002 was a much brighter year than 2001 was. Instead of spending most of the year mourning the losses of our closest family members, we were blessed with the celebration of many new beginnings. Weddings were celebrated for Amy s sister Carrie Thorn and

cousin Jason Reinhard. Amy s cousin Melody and her husband Scott Berube celebrated the arrival of their second son, Jacob.

It was also a spectacular Ruby Anniversary celebration year for Mom and Dad Vallone, who celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary in style complete with champagne and limousine escort!

## Useless Allergy Testing

Recently, I reached a point of intolerance with my allergic reactions that pushed me to visit the allergist for a series of allergy tests. Through the years—three to be exact (hmmm, coincidentally the same number of years we have had THE CAT) - It has become increasingly difficult to breathe and live a normal life. Without the miracle of inhalers, pills, breathing powders, and medical masks to filter out allergens, life was miserable inside our home. Purely by coincidence (you think?), when the cat is near me I would gasp for breath and my lungs would BURN with pain. A choking fit would typically ensue followed by a brief period of turning blue then hyperventilating to recovery. One can't imaging how difficult it was for me to have to endure this since being near the cat and cuddling with it was such a pleasure for me (PS—I have a bridge to sell).

*(Continued on page 7)*

## Paradise Calling

Have you ever “won” a free trip to a vacation resort? If you haven't, there are lessons to be learned from those who have. Read on.

Last Fall, we received a phone call notifying us that we had won a free Florida vacation from an outfit called “Paradise Adventures”. As the name implies, the company specializes in planning adventure vacations in scenic tropical locales. All we needed to do to claim our “prize” was to visit a local resort in a Syracuse suburb for a brief tour of their facilities to consider a possible membership.

I suppose the first warning sign should have been “local resort”. What kind of a resort can be supported by a Syracuse suburb? But what did we have to lose? We even had a chance to win a new car simply by showing up and “trying our key in the lock”!

*(Continued on page 6)*

### Christmas Eve Drink: SPICED CRANBERRY-APPLE CIDER

#### Ingredients:

- 2 quart of apple cider
- 1-1/2 quarts cranberry cocktail
- 1/4 cup brown sugar
- 3-inch cinnamon sticks
- 1-1/2 teaspoons whole cloves

#### Preparation:

- Heat to boiling; reduce heat and simmer 15 to 20 minutes.
- Strain. 25 servings (about 1/2 cup each)

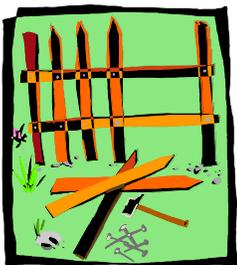
## Homeowner's Woes

Its a bit hard to believe that we've already been living in our house for over two years now! We love the design of our home and we have the perfect lot on a corner next to a beautiful pond, and just a short walk to the Lake Ontario shoreline! Still, we're finding that being new homeowners is providing more than it's fair share of stress. While not quite as extreme as "The Money Pit", we're finding that buying a used home can be full of surprises and lots of hard work. Since we never did get a newsletter published last year, I thought I'd bring you up to date on the new place.

We're still trying to understand how the former owners of this place lived the way they did. They used nothing but the cheapest seconds to build their home. The doors throughout the house are made of hollow cardboard. The linoleum flooring is peeling at all the seams creating a tripping hazard because it was never installed properly. The kitchen cupboards sway at the joints when you bump into them. Electric sockets pull right out of the wall when you unplug something. A stiff breeze blows through the living room windows and blows out candles on the coffee table. Every time I start a project to replace or repair something, I find that it's next to impossible because nothing is standard size, level, square, or meeting code. I don't know if I have more work to do inside or outside of the house.

Did you hear about the redwood fence fiasco? Pull up a chair .

### Fence Fiasco



I had set out to remove the ugly and decaying redwood fence that sloppily enclosed part of our backyard. We decided that

the easiest way to remove it would be to let somebody else do it! We snickered at our ingenuity as we put an add in the paper advertising a FREE wooden fence to anyone who was willing to remove it. The response to the ad was overwhelming! We responded to as many of the phone messages as we could and decided to offer it to the first person who responded to the ad. It was a farmer from Ontario who sounded excited and grateful when we called to arrange the pickup. He assured us that he would be able to remove the fence without our help and would leave no evidence that the fence had ever been there! He described an elaborate plan to "pull" each post out of the ground with his truck. We gave him permission to take it away at his convenience. The next day when we came home from work we saw that he had started. Many of the sections of fence had already been removed! Apparently, this project would take longer than he expected. Oh, well. That was his problem, we thought to ourselves! When we went into the house and checked our phone messages, there was a message from our farmer. He explained that he really only needed ten sections of fencing and that the posts were too difficult to remove because they were cemented into the ground. He thanked us again for our generosity and told us he would not be back. He wished us luck with the remainder of the removal project. We were livid. We would spend the entire summer digging out the fence posts and demolishing the remains of the fence with a chain saw so that it could be carried to the curb with the weekly

garbage over the course of six months.

### The Earth Moves

This Spring found us anxiously waiting to get out and spruce up the new yard now that the ugly fence was finally gone. Wow, our own yard! Let's see what we can do with it.

It's quite a good thing that we're both creative, because the previous owners did absolutely nothing as far as landscaping. Well, wait a minute...it looks like they tried to do some landscaping out back by the pond. Oh, wait, that's just garbage they left behind that they were too lazy to haul out to the curb! Well,

*...something looked unnatural about this. Was it a hill or a small mountain? Could it be an ancient burial site?*

one Saturday I was inspired to go out and clean up around the pond when I noticed all of the neighborhood children parading around the pond's perimeter with garbage bags. Led by a couple of the parents, they were collecting the Winter's debris from the water's edge. I went out and rented a weed trimmer that morning and started

in on the task of cutting down the overgrowth of straw grass that completely obscured the hillside that borders the pond on the edge of our property like a jungle. It was hard work, but when I needed inspiration I was only to look around at every other yard that surrounds the pond and admire how beautifully manicured they each were. All I needed to do was spend one weekend working as hard as I could and my yard too could be as nice.

Sweating, aching, and dizzy from the work I finally began to make progress! It was just about then that I came upon the mound. Not

(*"Homeowner's Woes" continued from page 2*)

far behind the shed I noticed that the Earth suddenly rose above the contour of the generally flat and gently sloping surface in the shape of a giant burial mound. Like a small mountain, something looked unnatural about this. Was it a hill or a small mountain? Could it be an ancient burial site? Uncovering the weeds from it's surface I was to



discover that it was indeed a burial site, however it was only as ancient as the last time the previous owner dumped his trash back there! Could it be that they didn't realize that in these modern times there exists a service to pick up your garbage at the front curb every week? How cheap and lazy could they have been? Perhaps they were nature enthusiasts and wanted to attract wildlife to the backyard by tempting it with the previous day's dinner scraps.

Now that I had uncovered it, I would have to go all the way and disassemble the great burial mound. Into the wheelbarrow I shoveled the decomposing remains of Hefty bags full of old grass clippings and other unidentifiable rotting vegetation. I still wonder if the previous owner was trying to build a compost heap but didn't realize that the use of plastic bags would slow the decomposition process. Now the bags were like Swiss cheese spilling the rotten remains of its inside all over my feet. At this point, I realized the remains spilling over my feet seemed to be alive with something. It was swarming

with ants! I had disturbed the largest ant colony in North America and they wanted revenge. As the ants tried to bite through my shoes and crawl up my pant legs I realized I was fighting a losing battle. I completely gave up when I discovered that the previous owner had carefully constructed the mound with a two-foot deep base of unwanted landscaping stone discarded from what was obviously a failed attempt at an early landscaping project. The stones could not be moved that day. At least I had accomplished the task of clearing the tall straw grass from around the pond. The view of the pond was breathtaking now that the weeds no longer obscured the water. As I re-

turned to work that week I dreamed of the grass and flower gardens we would plant in their place the following weekend. When the weekend arrived I gathered the flower and grass seeds and gazed out the window to plan my grand pond gardens. To my dismay, all of the swamp grass had grown back during the week.

## New Projects

We did manage to get a couple of trees planted since we moved in and even spent some time adding some flowers, a cherry tree, and a bird bath to the garden in front of the house. It also brought great satisfaction to demolish the useless shed in the back yard that did nothing but lend itself as a winter shelter to



wild animals that nested in wild pond weeds during the summer. The sand floor was a breeding place for local snakes and spiders. The bees also loved to build nests in the shed. Amy likes to keep us busy around the house. She gets a sadistic sat-



isfaction from never having time to sit and relax (...and snack .and watch TV...and do all of those other important household tasks that men do better than women!).

After having done such a nice job painting the master bedroom, Amy was eager to tackle another room. She did a fine job redecorating the downstairs bathroom last year, and this year felt the urge to work on yet another room - this time the formal dining room. We finally found the perfect antique dining room set to match my ideal specifications that had been driving Amy insane with frustration since we set out looking for one. We decided to decorate our formal dining room in the style of an antique Victorian parlor. Since this is the room that houses one of my largest antique radios and my antique phonograph, as well as our "new" antique dining furniture, all we needed was something different on the walls to complete the theme. We chose an antique red for the bottom and a golden wheat color for the top. The two



colors are separated by a narrow wallpaper border shares colors. per that both Sur-



# Whitewater Rafting For Beginners

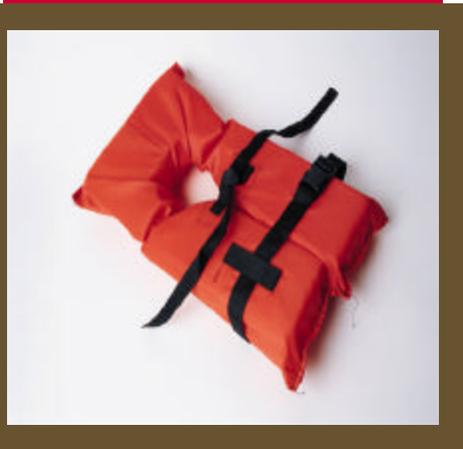
Hot dogs, barbecues, fireworks . . . and white water rafting? A Webster couple apparently decided that a rafting adventure in Western New York State's Grand Canyon of the East would be an exciting way to spend their Independence day.

Amy's friend, Kerri Kiniorski of Pittsford, NY, has always been the instigator of troublesome situations for Amy throughout much of the past three decades. Kerri and fiancé, Mike Epstein, coerced their friends Don and Amy to commit to a day on the whitewater July 4th.

It sounded exciting at first (as do all of Kerri's instigated ideas to Amy). Although neither Don nor Amy had ever rafted before, they were assured that the adventure would be tame. The course is rated one of the lowest levels in the country, and with lower water levels, how could there be any complications to a leisurely five-mile beginner course. Well, easily. It seems that in reality the lower the water level is the more complicated and dangerous the course can be. Lower water exposes the raft (nothing more than an oversized inflatable inner tube) to large outcroppings of jagged rocks. Now it began to become



*To demonstrate his seaworthiness on more than one occasion, he bravely fell into the water to save the ship and its crew*



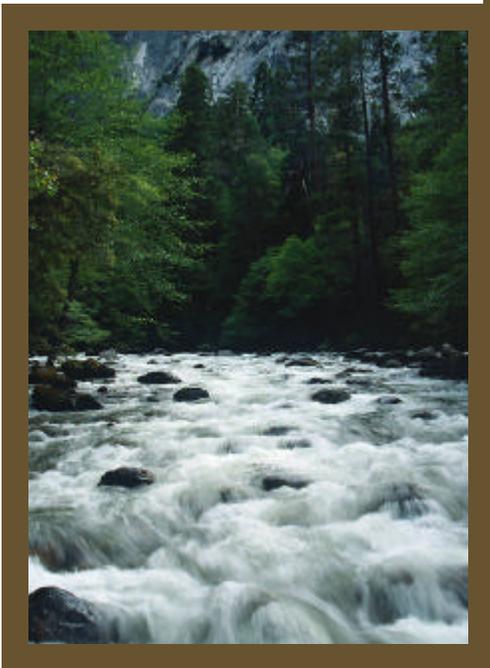
clearer. The squares of gray vinyl tape covering the outer surface of the raft were not a decorative quilting but instead patches covering a multitude of holes punctured by these jagged outcroppings on earlier and equally successful trips down the river.

One by one the rafts began to either overturn at the vicious rapids or get stuck on the rocks. Upon the latter, it would become necessary to rock the boat with the shifting of body weight with the raft and delicately

maneuver the paddles. Typically, upon releasing the raft from the jaws of death on the rocks, it would capsize anyway in the flush of whitewater that brought to mind the emptying of a toilet. As passengers were emptied from the overturning rafts and swallowed up by the whitewater, it became apparent why each rafter was required to wear a life preserver for the duration of the adventure.

Mike, the courageous captain of our vessel, took the brunt of the falls into the water to satisfy the hungry river. To demonstrate his seaworthiness on more than one occasion, he bravely fell into the water to save the ship and its crew (once even before the raft left the shore).

When all was said and done the adventure was enjoyed by all. The course followed five miles of the river canyon filled with inspiring scenery such as waterfalls and tidal pools.



For information on this and other white water adventures that you can experience, visit:

[www.adventure-calls.com](http://www.adventure-calls.com)

## Local Company ‘Turns Around’

Its been flailing in flood waters for a few years now, just barely able to keep above water. The flood waters have now receded and the company, which manufactures digital document equipment and production printing solutions among other things, can now clearly see the direction it must head in order to return to its former glory days and avoid collapse. Unfortunately, it has chosen to turn its back on the most obvious path to recovery while eliminating much of its vital work force that has been dedicated to the corporate recovery since the call for belt-tightening came from it’s cheery and confident CEO.



In its latest attempt to quell the tide of public controversy and distrust, the company has eliminated another 2400 jobs to demonstrate to its shareholders that it is dedicated to preserving the strength of the local economy while at the same time showing its appreciation to hard working employees for their dedication to it’s turn around plan. “Happy Holidays” was the theme from corporate headquarters running through the local campus in November as notices were released stating that holiday lights and decorations would be banned from employee’s offices and work areas this year because they represented a fire risk. Bathroom supplies, including soap, paper towels, and toilet paper were no longer being replaced in bathrooms other than corporate office complexes—another foreboding sign of things to come for local workers. Bonuses were distributed to Corporate leaders last month who lead the internal slave labor movement in order to meet accelerated



launch schedules for several products. A “new quality” policy was issued declaring that the company would now focus on getting its products out into the market more quickly with less testing, or even none at all. This came following a corporate-level finding that the testing of products significantly delays launch by identifying software and hardware problems which the quality assurance teams feel compelled to address before releasing the product to customers. With the new quality process in place, products will now be tested in the marketplace. By the time consumers report problems to the company, developers will already be nearing completion of replacement products that will have addressed some of the problems known to exist in the previously released products, while at the same time introducing new and innovative features that can again be tested by the consumer. It seems obvious to corporate leaders of the company that consumers will not be wise enough to stop walking into a solid brick wall and look for a different way to proceed beyond the wall. The company is banking on this customer ignorance assumption for its recovery and future earnings in the marketplace.



Meanwhile, after completion of the latest product launch cycles, much of the

slave labor force was released to freedom in November as one of the most extensive reductions in labor took place at sensitive levels of the corporate structure. Without so much as a handshake or a sprinkle of compassion, management directing the reduction rounded up workers in a manner reminiscent of a cattle call on a western ranch. Entire groups were dissolved (primarily quality assurance) and much of lower management was affected. More layoffs are scheduled over the next few months.

I will be designing flags and T-shirts to supplement unemployment benefits for the next few months. One of my first design ideas shows a company logo crumbling into dust. The caption reads, “We’re Making Changes...And It Shows!”. Another shows the CEO crying; “Difficult Times Require Difficult Decisions!” and shows a line of people standing blindfolded hand in hand in front of an office building facing a crazed firing squad. On the back of the shirt, the line of blindfolded people is now facing the building with their backs toward their executioners. Bullets are shattering heads and bodies, and blood is splattered across the building’s facade. Windows are broken and the bullet-ridden building is collapsing. The caption reads: “Our Company’s *Turn-Around* Plan in Action”.



P.S.—My psychiatrist feels that I will eventually make a full recovery and be released from this room with the soft walls. The straps on this jacket hurt!

*(“Paradise Calling” continued from page 1)*

So we spend a Sunday afternoon taking a country drive. And I mean country. This place was in the sticks on a country dirt road. Never the less, our curiosity was piqued. What fabulous resort was hidden away in a secluded wooded country setting that our income had qualified us for membership?

As we drove closer, the sight of run down aluminum trailers and of barking dogs digging through trash brought about the unpleasant fear that we had gotten hopelessly lost and were now miles away from the resort that we were supposed to be visiting. Now we would be late for our appointment for the resort tour! It also started to rain and the dirt road was becoming a muddy mess. Just then we saw a sign. Along the muddy road, it read; “Resort Parking Ahead: Tours Today”.

We were totally turned off by the fact that the resort was so close to a run down trailer park. However not as turned off (or maybe shocked?) as we were to find out that our resort WAS the run down trailer park!

We pulled in front of the office and questioned whether or not to even go in for our appointment with the nice clothes we had on to impress the staff that we were indeed membership-worthy. “We’ve driven this far”, Amy said, “so let’s just do it and get our free Florida vacation!”.



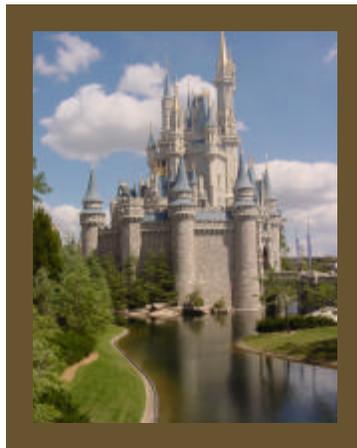
Inside, the old toothless woman at the desk registered us and explained how to check our key to see if it fit the car we had a chance to win. She pointed to a small table next to the desk that had a lock sitting on it. No car, just the small round keyhole mechanism that a key fits into. Of course ours didn’t, just like the thousands of others that tried. Was there really even a car? Well,

there was a picture of a car that was cut out of a newspaper ad tacked up to a corkboard.

We waited for our tour...and waited...and waited long beyond our scheduled appointment. The woman explained that they only had one person giving the tours. An hour and a half after our appointment we insisted that we couldn’t wait any longer and demanded our voucher for the free vacation. The woman reluctantly gave us the voucher and told us how to make our reservations for the Florida accommodations. We drove home frustrated, but managed to find the humor in the situation.

You can probably guess how the rest of the story goes as well. Paradise Adventures were next to impossible to contact. As the winter snow began falling and the bitter cold winds shouted “Go to Florida...Go to Florida!”, we finally did contact Paradise Adventures. However, we discovered that the free accommodations were only available on a couple of dates during the year (a Tuesday and Wednesday in June, I believe). All other dates required that a per-night premium be paid (equal to what you would spend at a Holiday Inn for a night). The fact that the accommodations were in some apartment complex with no maid service should not come as a surprise at this point.

We did eventually take our Florida vacation, spending part of the time with relatives and part of the time at Disney World. I’m sure that the Days Inn in Orlando was more of a resort than where we would have stayed for our “free” vacation. The Days Inn was certainly cheaper than our “free” accom-



*Amy in the Christmas village gift shop in Epcot Center’s World Showcase*



*The “Tower of Terror”, our favorite ride at Disney’s MGM theme park*



*Cruising to Marco Island on the boat with “Cap’n Bill” and the gang*



*Visiting the local flea market with Grandma and Grandpa*

*(“Allergy Testing” continued from page 1)*

One evening, while snacking on a bag of nuts, my eyes began to itch and tear. Suddenly I felt a strange swelling sensation in my throat and eyes. Then something began to interfere with my vision, closing it off like a constricting tunnel. The whites of my eyes were actually swelling up around my pupil and cutting off my vision! The cat looked on from a comfortable viewing angle on the sofa with an evil and obvious grin on its face—it’s whiskers twitching with delight and glimmers of light from the television screen glistened on its exposed fang. An emergency call to the doctor resulted in a recommendation that I be brought into Emergency immediately if a high dosage of antihistamine did not begin to reverse the process. Slowly throughout the night things improved, but the fear of this happening again prompted me to make the appointment with an allergist as Amy insisted that I must be allergic to nuts now, although I never have been all of my life!

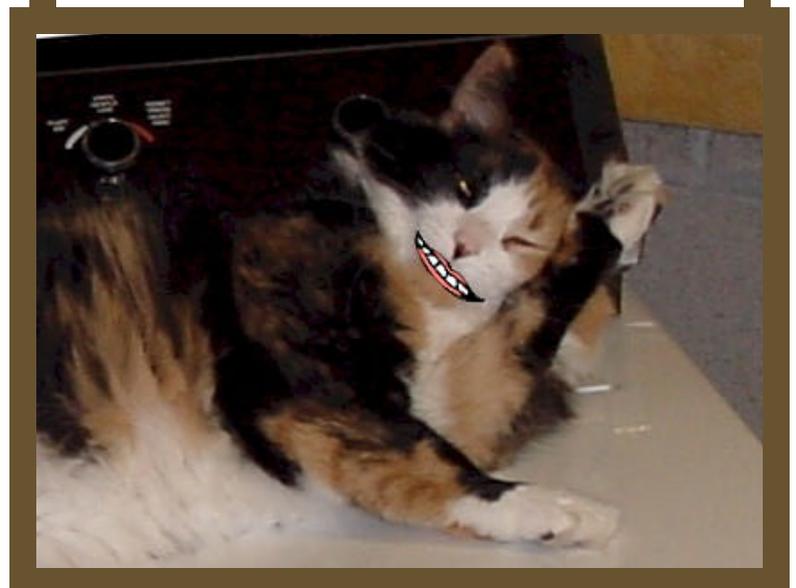
At the allergist, I was subjected to 112 needles for the testing. Young children down the hall screamed out in pain as they received a lighter version of the treatment. As the nurse wiped up the blood dripping from my back and arms, we waited for the results of the nut test. The findings for the most part were negative. There was no reaction at all to nuts! Only one injection spot swelled uncontrollably, turned red, and itched for hours afterward. I knew that this was the spot that would prove for once and for all that the cat was slowly killing me.

The nurse administering the test looked at the red spot and started making notes in my file. She paused for a moment and then started a one sided conversation about how adorable little kitties are and how they make the best pets. She was obviously a cat lover and in collaboration with all of the other cat lovers in the world, including Amy. Almost certainly, there must be a meeting at least once a month among these cat lovers to plan and connive methods of increasing the feline population and decreasing the husband population! Imagine my shock when the nurse insisted that the reacting spot was from DUST and not CAT! “Kitty’s just not showing a reaction!”, she exclaimed joyously with the same sort of devious grin and wrinkled whiskers that the cat manifests while enjoying my agony.

At home, I rested while my bloody back and arms healed from the painful testing. Suddenly, I felt that familiar shortness of breath and burning in my lungs. As I reached for my inhaler, I noticed the cat walk by with an evil grin and a twinkle in her eye. She had just come up from the basement and was covered with a thick layer of dust. She rubbed against my legs and purred. As chunks of dust dropped onto my clothing she said, “Meeeeeow”, which of course in cat language means “I hate humans and I’m going to kill you”!



*Autumn takes pleasure in rolling around in dust and lint in the basement. Here she is seen rolling on the clothes dryer. This is a good method to not only pick up excessive lint from the dryer itself, but also to create magnetic static electricity on her fur to enable the attraction of all other mite-infested dust throughout the house. Dust mites are the leading cause of severe aller-*



# Here it is! Don & Amy's Holiday Newsletter!

Your holiday season is now complete! Don & Amy's Holiday Newsletter has arrived! We've included some fun "news" stories for you to enjoy with a cup of hot cider next to the Yule fire. You've been to all of the holiday parties, Santa is delivering presents around the world, and now its time to relax. Put on some holiday music, light up the tree, and sit back with our newsletter. With the temperature and the snow falling outside, we hope your holiday spirit is rising inside!

**A Holiday Message From Don & Amy**  
As the old year comes to a close and a new year is at our doorstep, Amy and I would like to take a moment to thank each of you who made 2002 special in many ways. At this time of year it is easy to overlook the meaning of the season, but having friends and family to share this special time with is a highlight of the Christmas season for us. May the peace and joy of Christmas be in your hearts and in your homes this

year. We're sending many wishes from our house to yours for a bright new year filled with celebration, excitement, laughter, and love.

**Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!**  
Don & Amy

*Points of Interest Inside This Issue:*

- *Killer weeds attack homeowner*
- *Whitewater thrills rafters*
- *Marketing fraud is exposed*
- *Cat induces agony*
- *Local company crumbles*

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