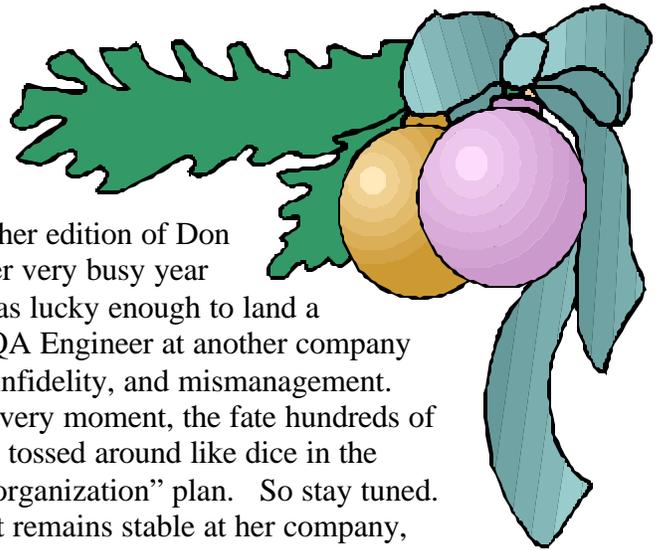


Merry Christmas, 2003!



Hello All! Looks like we've made it to yet another edition of Don & Amy's Holiday Newsletter! 2003 was another very busy year for us. After being unemployed last winter, I was lucky enough to land a similar position consulting as a Lead Software QA Engineer at another company that has not yet been raped by corporate greed, infidelity, and mismanagement. However, as my fingers hit the keyboard at this very moment, the fate hundreds of local professionals at my new company is being tossed around like dice in the virtual back alley of some senior manager's "reorganization" plan. So stay tuned. Amy's job as a Commercial Real Estate Analyst remains stable at her company, despite the struggles to make payroll during the weeks when the her management find it necessary to drain the company accounts or over-extend company credit beyond it's limits to purchase critical management tools such as seven thousand dollar jeweled timepieces that will no doubt save management countless dollars in lost efficiency.

Starting a new job always brings new challenges, and one for me has been my drive into work. After getting used to my leisurely three-minute ride down the street into work every morning at 8:57, I have once again met the mental and physical challenges of the sometimes hour-long commute through rush-hour traffic twice daily. Surviving the commute can be the ultimate rival to the popular reality TV show, although the jungle is made of asphalt that hosts drivers having absolutely no business operating a motor vehicle. In this reality series, the survivor wins nothing more than another hard earned day's pay that is shared in equal portions with the state and federal governments and the local cable and telephone service providers. What tools can these survivors call on to help them through the challenges? Well, one would definitely NOT be the radio morning shows these days. What was once a genuine service for the commuter, providing weather, traffic, and a few smiles to the frayed and weary road warriors, is now nothing more than a vehicle for advertisement. Nearly as bad as the SPAM that invades our email inboxes by the hundreds of messages a day, is the constant assault by radio personalities on the innocent and unsoliciting ear of the daily commuter as he sits motionless in a traffic bottleneck patiently tuned to the "news" radio program waiting for a traffic report. Traffic report? There's apparently just not enough time for more than five seconds of traffic highlights in between the commercials and blatant PSA's praising the good works of our local cable and telephone service providers! I also have no interest in learning how well Beth slept on her SleepNumber bed or how much Chet loves his RoadRunner and couldn't live without it. I just want to know where the accidents are that will make me late for work.

The continuing saga of our home improvement brings with it yet another chapter for the believe-it-or-not fans of our newsletter. This year we decided to build a small addition behind the garage to use for storage and a bit of extra living space. The brick patio behind the garage was the obvious choice for placement of the addition. The bricks were so misaligned and wobbly that it was impossible to set a piece of furniture on the m and have all four legs touch the ground at the same time. The patio was also infested with



ants. Most of the ants were likely refugees from the colony I destroyed out behind the shed a couple of years ago. Someone, who shall remain nameless, told me that if I sprinkle laundry detergent over the infested areas, the ants would eat it and die. My ants enjoyed the stuff and the colonies multiplied. The only redeeming factor in the extermination follies was the entertainment value of seeing part of the colony washed away on the foaming glaciers of soapsuds after every rain. The soap also seemed to help the weeds grow better. By summer the patio turned lush green with vegetation. Instead of a Victory Garden, our agricultural claim to infamy was the Sequoia-sized pricker weeds that poked their way up through the bricks to provide shade and nesting for local wildlife. We spent several weeks taking up the patio and unearthing nature's largest ant colonies. Black swarms of ants emerged from around our feet, protected from our frenzied stomping by full body armor made from crystallized laundry detergent. While we were dismantling the patio, we noticed a handful of bees buzzing around the kitchen door. As we swatted at them, they took shelter behind the siding. Concerned that they might be a problem, we called the bee exterminators who promptly sprayed all around the back of the house. Over the next few days, we started finding bees in the house that were acting very strange, as if they were experiencing some kind of brain damage from the spray. The indoor sightings became more numerous as the days passed until at one point there was probably several dozen walking, crawling, and hopping around on the carpet in every room on the average day. When we returned home after being away for a week in Vermont to celebrate our 5th wedding anniversary, the floors were covered in a dark layer of dried bee carcasses and the cat was belching up bees with a contented smile on her face for the following week. We finally had someone seal up all of the areas that potentially welcomed them in from outside and our problem disappeared....That is until we removed the kitchen wall when the addition was framed and discovered a ten foot long by four foot wide honeycomb hanging out of the kitchen ceiling! On the subject of the addition....Remind me NEVER to hire a contractor again. Just don't ask. Maybe there will be room in next year's newsletter for some tidbits (that is if it gets finished before next Christmas!).

All in all, we've had a pretty good year I suppose. We spent a week cruising the Caribbean with Mom and Dad late last winter (it was their first cruise) and as I mentioned before, Amy and I spent our anniversary in Vermont. We stayed in an authentic English Inne in the ski resort village of Stowe. Of course photos of everything are posted on the web site (vallonesworld.com). We have much to be thankful for this holiday season. Despite the misadventures of home owning, we are blessed with a fine home (albeit covered in cat hair and vomit) and the love of each of our lives to share it with. I pray that each of you will feel the blessings of the season in your own special way and take time to appreciate all that you have and all that you can do for others.

May the Peace of Christmas be with you all.

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year Wishes for 2004!

Don & Amy