

## The Septuagenarian Smokey Bear

HE's the longest-running symbol of the Ad Council and his image rivals Mickey Mouse and Santa Claus in name recognition. For much of his life, he's been a silent character speaking only his famous line: "Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires!"

Yes, Smokey Bear turned 70 this month, a testament to the constant attention we raise and pass on to future generations the importance of putting out camp fires in wooded areas.

Originally a wildlife symbol to alert the national public to preserve wood for the war effort, Smokey has been the face of print and TV ads and now a popular social media subject.

In the '40s, he was the imagination of Rudy Wendelin, an artist for the U. S. Forest Service. His art adorned publications, posters and various media forms for special events.

In 1950, a real life cub was rescued from a forest fire in New Mexico, restored to good health and became the live mascot at the National Zoo in Washington, D. C.

Today, Smokey is recognized by 94% of Americans, his costume has been updated, and, according to Ad Council CEO Peggy Conlon, "has a fresh new look." Now that he has his own Facebook page and Twitter



account, Smokey has become quite the celebrity.

"It turns out he does have a voice," says Conlon, "and it's very clever." Smokey has celebrated his 70th birthday with a series of YouTube videos rewarding campers who put out campfires properly with a big bear hug. He has roughly 300,000 Facebook "likes" and more than 25,000 Twitter and 800 Instagram followers.

He's linked up with Grammy winner Pharrell Williams, whose headgear resembles Smokey's hat, and his message runs as true as ever, considering California's recent spate of wildfires that have consumed more than 380,000 acres of land.

Smokey must be doing a good job. In 1944 at the time of his first message, there were 22 million acres of forest destroyed each year. Today, that number has dwindled to 6.7 million acres.

And his latest live nephew made the headlines in South Lake Tahoe near Wenatchee, Wash., where Cinder, a 39-pound black bear cub was rescued from a forest fire having suffered second and third-degree burns all over his body.

Happy birthday, Smokey, and watch where you blow out your candles! ■

### IT COSTS TO HAVE A FAMILY

For those who say that they'll leave their inheritance to their kids while they are on Earth, there's more proof that you already have.

The U. S. Department of Agriculture has released its latest findings on the cost to raise a child to age 18, and, to no surprise to anyone who's done it, it costs a lot.

It now costs, on average, \$245,340, a 1.8% increase over last year. Most of the expense is spread over four areas: housing (30%), education (18%), food (16% – a lot higher if it's a teenager!) and transportation (14%).

That average is higher in the Northeast (\$282,480) and less in the South (\$230,570). Per annum, it costs a middle-class, two-parent household between \$12,800 and \$14,970 in child expense. It's a study that has been conducted annually since 1960. ■

### Hail Caesar's Grandnephew

August 19th marked the 2,000th anniversary of the death of Augustus, the first Roman emperor and the man named for our eighth month of the year.

Even though our calendar is based on the Romans' astronomical thinking of linking lunar faces with the number of days in a month, along with some leap year tweaking by Pope Gregory in the 16th century, it was Julius Caesar – one of the first recognized conquering heroes in the modern age – who reconstructed a calendar that was badly inaccurate.

To honor him, July was named after him and was given the full complement of 31 days. Years later, Augustus defeated Marc Antony and Cleopatra and was named emperor of Rome. He was given the month after his granduncle. Since his success rivaled Caesar's, he, too, was given a month filled with 31 days.

Alas, poor February, which was already the odd man out as the leap year victim, sacrificed another one of its days to accommodate Augustus. The rest is calendar history. ■

### Do You Recall?

It's almost a daily headline when another automaker announces a recall of models because of defective equipment. Do you want an easy way to find out if your vehicle is on the red list?

This month, the U. S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration launched a new, free, online search tool that will enable consumers to find out quickly if their wheels are vulnerable.

Simply go online to [www.safercar.gov/vinlookup](http://www.safercar.gov/vinlookup), and match up your vehicle identification number with the recall list that the NHTSA has updated on a weekly basis.

You can easily find your VIN by looking from the outside driver's window to the VIN plate mounted on the upper dashboard. ■



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As you know, I do quite a bit of traveling to popular and strange places around the globe using my court reporting skills at sporting events. Awkward moments abound, but somehow I get by and make new friends and relationships which is a highlight to my journeys.

But soon, I'll be holding my breath as I embark on a terrifying social event much closer to home – my high school reunion! As anyone who remembers his or her own reunion, the anxiety of those first few moments is palpable. The years have certainly changed the look of our high school yearbook pictures, and I pray that they'll be handing out name tags to attendees.

Over the years, cliques and hangouts melt into a common fraternity of class years.

We're all more concerned about health and good stories than we are about our looks, our popularity and who's been seen with whom. It might make for good gossip, but as for me, those days are over!

After traveling to the East Coast for two weeks and the UK, working at major golf championships, it'll be great to be back home in the Pacific Northwest, where the beautiful scenery is second to none!

### Who Needs the Fed?

Who needs lower interest rates and monetary easing to trigger the economy when you have a good luck statue? In Germany, it's the figure of Carl Wilhelm von Heideck, a 19th century military officer, who sits in the federal labor office in Ingolstadt.

There, employees traditionally rub his nose for good luck and steady work. It seems to be paying off. The local jobless rate in Ingolstadt is a measly 2.3%, compared to the national rate of 5.1% which, in itself, grows a pretty healthy economy. The entire European economy is sluggish at an unemployment rate of 11.5%. ■