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Americans ‘Get It’

It used to be that Americans were a singular group. Show us an ATM, and we would ignore it. “I want to see a real person.” Pump your own gas – never (until it costs $50 cents a gallon to have someone come out and spill gas all over your car). Cellphones – ha, who needs ‘em?

I think, however, that we have come of technology age, so to speak.

Case in point – Houston is installing P and D machines throughout the city. They are going in with nary a hiccup, it seems. People are lining up to use them, and try as they may, the media can’t seem to find anyone who is having problems with the technology. There’s also

the story out of Newark, NJ, where the only person the reporter could find who had a problem with the new system was the reporter himself.

Now that may be because DPT, the manufacturer of Houston’s machines, has done a good engineering job, and for all I can see, they have, but I doubt it’s the real reason.

I think Americans who have grown up with the Internet, computers, ATMs and cellphones are now beginning to park cars. Technology is no longer frightening. Those of us “of a certain age” have folded and now can “text message” with the best of them. When I see 60-year-old grandmothers sitting on a train or at the library with their iPods firmly planted in their ears, and little old ladies in walkers straining to reach the buttons on an ATM, I know that we in the parking industry have little to fear as technology moves forward.

The fear of technology has gone the way of the dodo. For those in our industry, this is a good thing. For society as a whole, that’s another story.

$2.70 a Month to Park in Boston ...

... at a high school, that is. And of course, there is a problem with too many students, not enough space. I have a solution.

1. Raise the price to $10 a month. If you can afford a car, you can afford $10 a month to park it. Use the money to provide better uniforms or instruments for the band, or more paint for the art department, or a new nuclear reactor for the physics department.

2. Base the parking permits on one’s grade point average. Those with higher GPAs get a space; those with lower ones don’t.

3. If that doesn’t solve the problem with space allotment, add the class ranking of the student to the mix (seniors first, etc.).
Problem solved. Reading the article about the high school, one might surmise that the principal in charge of parking won’t do any of these things. Might offend someone.

Oh, they also won’t oversell – even though they know that every day nearly 10 percent of the spaces are empty, for whatever reason. Why not oversell by 5%? Oh, one of the little darlings might not find a space. Let them get there early.

They are “negotiating” with a nearby church to rent spaces there. I suggest they charge more for them, since they have to rent spaces, and let the kids decide if they want to study harder or pay more.

I can just see it – Sorry, can’t party tonight. Have to bring my chemistry grade up to a “B” so I can keep my parking permit.

Want a Parking Structure? Not This Year

It’s true – according to parking architect Rick Choate the building of a parking structure, particularly in the West, is problematic at best.

Oh, there are a bunch on the drawing board, a bunch funded, and a bunch that are ready to go. But there’s no one to build them.

Building a parking building, according to Rick, is a craft that only a few have perfected. Many try to build garages, but most end up way over budget. The construction firms that can bring a ramp in on time and on budget and with good quality are frankly sold out. They simply can’t find enough skilled workers to hire to build the buildings in their order books.

This has driven the cost of garage construction through the roof. I’ll bet you thought it was those crafty Chinese who are taking all the steel and concrete to build their infrastructure. No so, says Choate.

Think about it, garages are 30% material, 70% labor. Garages that should cost $12,000 a space are costing $20,000 or more, not because of the cost of materials, but because if you want one built, you have to pay the price.

The smart owner will allow his architect to work with a builder to design a parking structure that fits the builder’s way of construction (forms, timing and the like). Then the builder can take the job, get in, build it and get out. According to Choate, if you want your garage built, make sure it fits the mold, literally. Buildings that have a lot of “hand work,” – that is, fancy exteriors, non-standard shapes, and the like – can cause many contractors to take a pass, or bid a number so high they won’t get the job.

Whew

Log on to PT’s Parking Blog at www.parkingtoday.com

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New Products

CARLISLE INTRODUCES FLEXPHALT TWF SELF-ADHERING BUILDING FLASHING

PIPS Technology introduces a new portable ALPR system for the automation of vehicle inventories, identification of scofflaw vehicles, and those that are not registered in a permit-based parking system. The MobileLPI allows users to drive through a parking lot and inventory vehicles via PIPS’ advanced automatic license plate recognition technology. Simultaneously, the system may check for scofflaw and permit violations.

It consists of the dual channel (integrated color and infrared) P362 camera; a ruggedized laptop (or existing MDT); and MobileLPI software. The complete system is available directly from PIPS or through authorized PIPS distribution. The P362 may be affixed to the vehicle permanently, or may use one of PIPS’ portable camera mounts, which allow for the system to move easily from one vehicle to another.

MobileLPI further complements PIPS’ complete offering of fixed and mobile ALPR cameras, processors, OCR engines and software interfaces.

For more information, log on to www.parkingtoday.com. Click on “ePIP” and then “New Products.”

JERON ANNOUNCES SPECTRUM 430-IP LAN INTERCOM SYSTEM

The Spectrum 430-IP intercom system from Jeron employs packet audio technology to provide voice communication and signaling on a Local Area Network (LAN) for both master-to-master and master-to-substation internal intercom applications.

The 430-IP system supports a broad scope of station types and features for hands-free duplex conversations, paging and control of access in parking garages, detention facilities, healthcare and corporate campuses.

Some of its advantages include:
- can be connected to existing LAN
- direct interface to fiber-optic transceivers
- master stations with digital LCD display of called ID/caller ID
- reduced equipment requirements
- overall cost savings

Spectrum 430-IP’s basic system comprises a 430-IP Central Exchange, linked by a LAN to IP-Station Hubs with digital or analog stations. One can support up to six I hubs and 48 stations.

For more information, log on to www.parkingtoday.com. Click on “ePIP” and then “New Products.”

Information is King...

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Our system enables your customers to pay or add time to any parking space at any of your system’s pay stations regardless of network status. No need to return to the original parking area or place the receipt on the dash.

Enforcement personnel view the status (in real time) of all spaces in your entire town, paid or unpaid via a wireless internet connection to your Metric Enforcement Web Pad. No need to check dashboards or individual meters.

Please contact Metric Parking today for the latest information regarding Multi Space parking systems.

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MACKAY GUARDIAN MULTI MAKES DEBUT

MacKay Meters introduces its latest multi-space parking machine, the MacKay Guardian Multi. The newest addition to its parking product line includes many positive changes and upgrades such as ADA compliance and the option of a paper bill acceptor housed in the main cabinet.

Available in pay-and-display and pay-by-space configurations, the MacKay Guardian Multi offers powerful off-site monitoring capabilities by adding a communications kit and multi-web and remote-alert modules. It also can be upgraded as a Chip Card Reload Station, allowing customers to pay for their parking and reload the value of their MacKay parking cards all with one machine.

For more information, log on to www.parkingtoday.com. Click on "ePIP" and then "New Products."

VISA-APPROVED TRIPLE-DES ENCRYPTING PINPAD

MGR Industries’ new family of VISA-approved triple-DES encrypting PINpads feature all-metal keypads with engraved graphics. The units are NEMA 4 sealed at the face. Anti-vandal and weather-resistant, the rugged devices are perfect for use in unattended and exposed applications. They are rated to an operating temperature of –20C to +60C. This family of keypads allows for both clear and encrypted output. They are capable of Master Session and DUKPT key management. In addition to supporting the triple-DES algorithm, the MGR PINpads also support single-DES electronic keys for legacy systems.

For more information, log on to www.parkingtoday.com. Click on "ePIP" and then "New Products."

CVPS’ SELF-SERVICE VALET KIOSK

Self-serve request kiosks from Computerized Valet Parking Systems allow departing customers to initiate their vehicle retrieval with a simple swipe of their bar-coded valet parking ticket. Customers may wait inside a climate-controlled space in view of the staging area until their vehicle is retrieved. Request kiosks also may be used as “retrieval points,” where a full drop-off valet service is generally not provided.

Features include a pay-by-credit card option and current wait-time information. Kiosks are available in painted or stainless steel and finished wood or Formica. They require power and a computer network connection.

For more information, log on to www.parkingtoday.com. Click on "ePIP" and then "New Products."

REG-Z1 ACHIEVES LICENSE PLATE CAPTURE UP TO 120 FEET

The Spectrum 430-IP inteExtreme CCTV announces the release of the REG-Z1 License Plate Capture camera. Incorporating Extreme’s proprietary DHC-Imaging technology, it delivers definitive high-contrast license plate capture up to 120 feet – the greatest operational range of the REG product family. Based on award-winning REG technology currently in successful application at thousands of sites worldwide, REG-Z1 operates under any lighting condition – from total darkness to direct glare from high-beam headlights – capturing plates from vehicles moving at up to 120kph (~190kph). Also featuring an overview camera that captures additional video evidence such as vehicle shape, color and other details, REG-Z1 is precision-engineered for absolute performance in critical applications such as automatic license plate recognition.

For more information, log on to www.parkingtoday.com. Click on "ePIP" and then "New Products."

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The session includes six seminars originating from different locations around the U.S. Some will be live at your location, others “beamed” live from other cities. You will be able to participate, ask questions and get answers.

Plus we will have Speed Networking – meet associates from your area in the parking business, get their contact data and some insight into what they do. Then when you need resources you will have information in your rolodex (or palm pilot). You’ve heard of Speed Dating. Here’s the networking equivalent.
The seminars:

- **The Public Private Partnership:** Leasing the parking infrastructure. This is the hot topic today — sell or lease your parking facilities to the private sector. Get a lot of money now to use on other projects, and ensure you have parking facilities in the future. They’ve done it in Chicago. Why not in your city?

- **Technology – On Street and Off Street:** The cutting edge. Clear away the hype. Clearly understand what is available now and what’s on the horizon. What works and what doesn’t.

- **Personal Service – Valet and Amenities:** Taking parking to the next level. You can have a valet operation in your university, city, hospital, or shopping center. Here’s how. Amenities – why not a car wash? Make some money and offer a service everyone wants.

- **Revenue Control:** Collect, audit, and ensure you do it right. Here you go. This is the most attended and valued seminar we have. We pull no punches. See this one and increase your bottom line — and your service to your customers.

- **Parking Structures:** 10 things everyone does wrong and 10 things that can save your project (any maybe your job). Do you want to have a work of art, or a functional garage on time and on budget?

- **The Cost of Operations:** Be sure you spend money in the right place: Change your lights, maintain your slab, and pay your manager more. Here’s the straight information. Invest now, save big bucks later.

**When:** April 18, 2007 – 8 AM - 5 PM

**Where:**

- **Chicago** – Northern Illinois University Outreach Center, Naperville, IL
- **San Francisco** – Mission Bay Conference Center at UCSF, San Francisco, CA
- **Seattle** – Bell Harbor International Conference Center, Seattle, WA
- **New York** – SUNY Purchase College, Purchase, NY

**Cost:** $245 Includes Lunch


**Register:** www.parkingtoday.com/paa  **Questions?** Contact Sandra Watson 310-390-5277 x 4
**WMATA Combines Parking, Rail-Fare Collection**

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) has awarded an $11.58 million contract modification to Cubic Transportation Systems to implement software and technology upgrades that will unite WMATA rail, park-and-ride and regional bus systems through common smart card media and a centralized transaction processing and reporting back-office system.

The system enhancements include new state-of-the-art contactless card readers at all Metro subway and parking facilities, which will expand the already successful SmarTrip regional smart card system. The upgrades will increase efficiencies and open new commercial opportunities that could save the agency millions of dollars in annual operating costs.

Under the contract add-on, Cubic will migrate WMATA’s legacy mainframe computer system to one processing platform. Nextfare, an enterprise management system for transit fare programs, is a configurable suite of software modules and applications that provide the core fare collection - which will be implemented for WMATA’s system - as well as financial accounting, including revenue clearing, settlement and reporting.

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**White Rock, BC, Receives Innovation Idea Award**

White Rock, Canada, recently received an Innovative Idea Award from the Government Finance Officers’ Association (GFOA) of British Columbia in recognition of the city’s waterfront pay-parking technology and practices.

Nominations for the award are submitted by the peers of the GFOA, which includes other finance officers from British Columbia municipalities, local government auditors and representatives from the province. The Innovative Idea Award recognizes originality/creativity of a program/project that has overall significance to local government.

Sandra Kurylo, the city’s Director of Finance, commented: “The ability to accept credit cards at all of our pay stations has benefited parking patrons, and the online monitoring and reporting features of LUKE [parking pay stations] have contributed to streamlining processes. The success of the waterfront parking project also was aided by the tremendous support that Digital Payment Technologies gave us during the implementation process and afterwards.”

The city installed the first LUKE parking pay station in November 2004. Since that time, hundreds of parking meters and seven older technology dispensers have been replaced with the 36 LUKE pay stations needed to service the 900 parking spaces in White Rock’s beachfront area.
PT’s wandering editor may show up most anywhere in the world. In the past six months, he has been in England, Ireland, Canada, Scotland, Washington, DC, San Francisco, Seattle, Las Vegas, Chicago, Dallas, Phoenix, San Diego, Indianapolis, Milwaukee and Philadelphia – and he did drop in at his house once or twice in the Mar Vista area of Los Angeles.

Each month, readers are able to send us their solutions to the puzzle from a link on our Web site (there’ll be more clues there, too.) The monthly winners will receive:

1. A “PT the Auditor” T-shirt.
2. Recognition in the next issue of Parking Today.
3. Placement in a drawing to win an Apple iPod (one presented each month).

PLUS – Every winner will go into a GIANT Sweepstakes Drawing. The contest will run 10 months, through June 2007. In July 2007, one name will be drawn and the grand prize winner will receive:

A one-week all-expenses-paid vacation for two to Hawaii or Las Vegas, or a cruise in the Caribbean. You get to choose.

Can you figure out Where in the World Is JVH? Check out the picture at bottom left and then go online to www.parkingtoday.com – click on “Where In the World,” read some more clues, then enter the contest and win.

Clue for where in the world this is:

Ah, a skyline at night. It’s November, not too cool, not too hot.
Is it Seattle? Similar climate, different time zone.
This capital city has more than three and a half million people and an obviously distinctive skyline. A river runs through it.
The riverwalk is great – you sit outside and eat, drink, party. You can take boat trips along the riverfront.
The airport is north of town, and the beaches and the ocean are on the south.
For more clues, log on to www.parkingtoday.com and click on “Where In the World.”

www.parkingtoday.com
Hourly Rates “Out” in Spain

BY PETER GUEST

I am just back from speaking at the first ever Iberian Parking Conference in Oporto, Portugal. The two-day event was jointly organized by the Portuguese National Parking Association and their Spanish colleagues. It was a pretty swish affair, with about 150 delegates who attended a gala dinner that was held, where else, in the cellars of Taylor’s, the famous port company. Before dinner, we were given a conducted tour of the cellars and had the various types of port explained. I had never realized, for example, that 10-year-old port may not actually be 10 years old. The age describes the richness of the flavor, rather than the vintage of the wine, whereas, vintage port is the true age of the wine.

The big issue in Spain at present seems to be a court decision that ruled out hourly tariffs on the grounds that it was unfair to charge someone for an hour’s parking if they stayed only a few minutes. If I understand things correctly, tariffs now increase in five-minute steps, but far from saving drivers money, the operators have done the sums and now charge more per minute, so they still get the same return per car and the guy who genuinely parks for an hour pays about 20 percent more.

Wouldn’t it be interesting if the court’s philosophy were applied to other things? I checked out of my hotel an hour early, should I ask for a discount? What about that meal where I didn’t finish the dessert; can I have some money off?

The paper I delivered, about parking technology, was scheduled to last about 30 minutes, but the organiz-
If you own parking property and are looking for an exit strategy or a redevelopment partner, call Next Parking. We've acquired over $60 million in parking property accounting for more than 7,000 spaces in the past year. Whether you own an old, new or proposed garage, self-park or valet, surface lot or structured garage, urban or off-airport site, contact Bob Caplin confidentially at 847-881-2004 or rcaplin@nextrealty.com.

This valet parking structure, located at the intersection of State, Rush and Oak Streets in Chicago's Gold Coast, contains 322 spaces on seven floors and is open 24-hours a day, seven days a week.

They Were

ers got a bit carried away slotting in late speakers. By the time I got on the stage, this had been cut back to just 10 minutes, which gave me just about enough time to say “hello and thank you for inviting me” and wait whilst this was translated into Spanish and Portuguese.

We just had time to talk about a few things, including mobile phone parking, which seems unlikely to have a future in Iberia because of the need to provide a receipt with a payment. I didn’t have too much time to talk to the people there, but I kind of got the feeling that as the rest of the world looks toward ever more sophisticated technological solutions, they were in danger of going the other way.

In a Hole – Stop digging

That’s advice that motorist Ryan Williams of Cardiff might have done well to heed. In February 2005, Ryan stopped in Cowbridge, South Wales, to let a friend out of his car. A local police officer said he had stopped on a pedestrian crossing and issued him a $120 ticket. Ryan said he didn’t stop on the crossing and opted to go to court, where he was found guilty. Ryan is a man of strong principles and returned to court no less than 15 times in the next 18 months to argue his innocence, losing on each occasion. He has finally called it a day, having run up a $15,000 legal bill, in addition to the $120 fine and $300 prosecution costs. He has, however, apparently escaped the $70,000 bill for court time and police administrative costs.

Communication

I have always felt that Variable Information Signing was of limited value, especially to local car parks, since in most places: (a) the majority of drivers will know where the car parks are; (b) they will often ignore the information on the signs, preferring to go and, if necessary, queue for their favorite car park; and (c) it is seldom possible to give enough information to help the real stranger to make an informed decision. In a town near London, someone decided that “the message” should be simplified. They hacked the system and replaced the normal “SPACES/FULL” option with the simpler F**K OFF.

And a Happy New Year to You

Something similar happened a few years ago in Dublin, where a large variable text information board had been erected in O’Connell Street in time to inform Christmas shoppers of the up-to-the-minute traffic and parking news. The sign allowed free text until the Saturday before Christmas, when the operator had a liquid lunch courtesy of Arthur Guinness. As the car parks filled up, he became tired of dealing with phone calls from drivers looking for a space and changed the sign to the simple message: “THE CAR PARKS ARE ALL FULL SO F**K OFF THE LOT OF YOU.” The sign can now show ONLY pre-approved messages.

Don’t Call Us …

Coventry City traffic engineers definitely get a Homer Simpson Award for their new roundabout, which made the National News recently. For those who are not familiar with the concept, the roundabout is a way of managing traffic at a road junction so that as a vehicle approaches the junction, it gives way to vehicles coming from the right (in the UK) and has priority over traffic coming from its left. A driver goes round the roundabout until they reach the road they want and then turn left to leave the junction. Or not. In Coventry, a new roundabout has a banned left turn at every exit, so that once a driver enters the roundabout, they have no legal exit. Coventry City absolutely deny that they sent an engineer out to investigate and he is still driving round the junction trying to find a way back.

The Ultimate Enforcement Authority

Parking enforcement always gets bad press. It is apparently the god-given right of every driver to park when and where they want, for their own convenience, regardless of the effect on others. If anyone dares to complain or, heaven forefend, issue a ticket, they are Nazis, the devil’s agents or worse. I had to smile, therefore, at the sign in a car park at a church in a busy town center.

This car park is for the use of churchgoers only; unauthorized users will be:

a) Blocked in
b) Prayed for

Can’t appeal against that one! Does it work? The car park is empty.

Peter Guest is PT’s correspondent in Europe and President of the British Parking Association. He can be reach at peterguest@parking1.freeserve.co.uk

If you own parking property and are looking for an exit strategy or a redevelopment partner, call Next Parking. We’ve acquired over $60 million in parking property accounting for more than 7,000 spaces in the past year. Whether you own an old, new or proposed garage, self-park or valet, surface lot or structured garage, urban or off-airport site, contact Bob Caplin confidentially at 847-881-2004 or rcaplin@nextrealty.com.
Central ‘Exploring Strategic Alternatives’

Central Parking Corp. has retained The Blackstone Group as its financial adviser to assist in exploring strategic alternatives to enhance stockholder value, the company said. This is the second time in a year that Central has begun the process that may lead to its eventual sale. The previous process was terminated in June 2005.

Emanuel J. Eads, Central Parking’s President and Chief Executive Officer, said that “although the company has met with certain interested parties, at this time no agreements or understandings have been reached with any party as to the terms of a possible transaction. There is no certainty that any such transaction will actually occur in either the short or long term.” Eads said, “and the company is continuing to implement its previously announced strategic plan.”

New Structure in Final Design for Grand Rapids Airport

Final design is nearing completion for the new parking garage at the Gerald R. Ford International Airport in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The cast-in-place post tensioned concrete structure will encompass four levels and accommodate 5,000 vehicles. It is designed to make airport parking as easy and convenient as possible for the thousands of people who will use it every day, with such features as a circular helix for easy vehicular access, two pedestrian bridges at the 2nd level, rental car counters at ground level in the garage, and a “Welcome Wall” in the middle of the garage with general interest information, maps, Accommodations, and history about the Grand Rapids area.

To help protect both people and vehicles from the weather, a large canopy spans between the garage and the terminal and the top is covered by a roof. Architectural features include glass and terra cotta accents on the building’s facade. Carl Walker, Inc. is performing a number of functions on this project, including structural design, signage consulting, and design of electronic car-count and parking and revenue control systems. Owned and operated by the Kent County Department of Aeronautics, the $74 million garage is scheduled to be completed in the fall of 2009.
The Future of Parking...

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They Add Insult to Injury

Paul Manning Jr. had a problem. He was “following the money” in hopes of catching an illicit parking operator, William Francis Smith, and mob boss Maria LaFlonza with their fingers in the cookie jar, so to speak. He was, however, caught by some gunsels and taken prisoner.

His father, Paul Senior, who had spotted the incident, called his buddy Bill Vose at the LAPD, and SWAT was on the way. Then he spotted a large car making its way up the road.

It was Smith, with someone else in the car. Paul Senior decided to circle around and get as close to the house as he could. When the car stopped, the driver opened the door. Smith hoisted his 300 pounds out of the back seat. He then turned around and put out his hand to assist the other person in the car.

When Paul Senior saw who it was, his mind went wild. How could his former client, Betty Beeson, be here and obviously not under duress? He could tell because she gave Smith a peck on the cheek and put her arm through his as they walked to the front door.

A few minutes later, LaFlonza and Betty’s auditor, Marilyn North, showed up. Paul Senior had wondered why everyone seemed to know what was going on all the time. North was a plant. He was able to rescue his son without making a fuss, but as soon as the escape was discovered, everyone in the house was out in front and Betty was screaming her head off. She wasn’t frightened; she was angry.

“What kind of incompetents do you employ, William? And you, Maria. How can you constantly let these Mannings give you the slip?” Betty was mad as hell.

It was as if they all worked for her. Then the fog began to lift. Paul Senior had been wrong about a lot of things. He had been wrong for 30 years …

I came into focus so rapidly my head whipped around and I looked directly at Paulo. My son gave me a shrug. “What?” he said.

“I have been conned from the very beginning. In that first case before you were born, Betty did kill Quintana and for some reason LaFlonza took the fall. You saw the way they were talking down there; it was as if Betty were the boss … Betty … the boss.”

That was it. Betty Beeson was somehow connected with the New Jersey group, and my guess was that if we did a bit of research, we would find that the only time she had been in Iowa was when the train that brought her to California crossed between the cornfields.

OK, now what? I was sure I was right, but how to prove it?

My guess was that Betty called me that morning 30 years ago really in fear. She had killed a man and needed help. She made up a story, which was pretty shaky, but it got me involved. However, before I could get to her, LaFlonza had stepped in and started to clean up the mess. Unfortunately, I kept stirring things up, and the problem wasn’t going to go away. Betty must be really connected for LaFlonza to have gone to prison for her.

I turned to Bill and told him my scenario.

“It’s pretty shaky. For LaFlonza to have taken the risk that she might get the gas chamber …”

“Not really,” I said. “She had the best lawyers money could buy. She knew that with a ‘crime of passion’ defense she would get only a few years, plus time off for good behavior. For all we know, the judge was on the take, too.”

“Well, it’s pretty far-fetched. Betty would have to be somebody’s daughter, or something. And I don’t think so, with a name like Beeson.”

That was it. Bill had nailed it. Betty was the daughter of some capi di capos back east. She probably came out here to get a feel for the family business and got herself in trouble. As for her name, she changed it so she could operate more in the open. She had been running the wiseguy operation here in L.A. for the past 30 years. But Bill was skeptical.

“Sure, it’s a theory, and I may even believe it, but we have this minor problem. Evidence. Seeing her with Smith and a few words on the front porch didn’t really make a case for the D.A. At this point, we got nothing. I’m sending SWAT home, and my suggestion is that you two go soak off some of that Santa Monica Mountain dirt.”

By JVH
Paulo and I got in the Outback and headed back to the office. To say Shirley was relieved was an understatement. First she hugged us both and then she hit me on the arm. “Why did you let him get into this mess?”

Paulo and I spoke at the same time. When the dust settled, we all agreed that perhaps we needed to be a bit more careful in our actions in the future. Dealing with the crooked-nose group wasn’t the same as chasing down payment skips and getting a few incriminating photos through a bedroom window.

There was one thing for certain. Betty, LaFlonza and Smith weren’t going to go away. We had one advantage; they didn’t know we knew what we did. They hadn’t seen me at the hideout in the mountains and may have figured that even if I were around, I was too busy rescuing Paulo and wouldn’t have noticed Betty and Marilyn.

Maybe we could use that to our advantage. We decided to call it a day.

I asked Paulo to join us for dinner, but he said he wanted to drop by Cedars-Sinai to see how our current client, Grace Lundquist, was doing. She had been shot while telling us about the garage next to the office building where she worked, and that started this little adventure. She and Paulo were becoming close. Paulo was trying, and failing, at keeping an ethical distance from the young, beautiful client. I wasn’t worried. She seemed like a nice girl, and Paulo’s ethics would stand up to anyone’s.

I was looking forward to having an evening alone with my wife. We arrived at the house off Mulholland Drive and all was quiet. Not a car around, no sign of any tampering with the door. For the first time in almost 24 hours, I began to relax. That lasted about 10 seconds.

We walked into the living room and Betty Beeson, Maria LaFlonza, William Francis Smith and Marilyn North had made themselves comfortable. To add insult to injury, Smith was even drinking some of my 15-year-old Laphroaig. Betty was holding a very lethal looking automatic.

“Hello Paul, Shirley,” Betty said. “I have decided that it’s time to bring this chapter in our lives to a close, once and for all.”

To be continued ...
Most of my comments have been on auditing in garages. Seems reasonable, since that’s what I do. However, the other day I was involved in an intriguing conversation about on-street parking and the way cities write citations and collect them. I was amazed, and I put the ideas forward here without comment. I would need to do more discovery before I can either confirm or deny, but they are compelling. (Ye gads, one article in PT by a lawyer and I’m beginning to sound like one.)

First, the statement: One fellow in the group on which I was eavesdropping said simply that 95 percent of the possible citations in his small community were never written. Wow – my auditor mind says that that number is a really big one.

OK, some context. The speaker was from a relatively small city (less than 100,000 population). A lot of the parking violations were for overstaying the time limit for free parking. You know – “Restricted Parking – Two Hours Only” or whatever. How do they deal with it? Basically, chalking. Somebody goes around and marks the cars and then goes around two hours later and tickets every car with a mark.

Out of the blocks I can see what he is saying. First off, there are probably cars that had been there for 30 minutes or an hour when they were charked. So, if they left one hour and 59 minutes after chalking, they were in violation. So the technology, or lack of it, used by the enforcement arm of the city is the problem. But that’s only a small part of the issue.

He went on to say that the other problem is they chalk only “problem” areas. That is, places where they have had complaints. “Let’s face it: We don’t have enough enforcement folks to do the job right. To do so would mean we would have to have a two-person crew for every three or four blocks. That’s not going to happen.”

So there is a second problem. That is, most violations go completely unreported.

I was sitting there content in my new-found knowledge when he added another zinger. “Well,” he said, “I have to admit that we also don’t get to all the metered violations, either. We treat metered parking just the same as unmetered.”

Wow! Basically, he’s saying that 95 percent of all parking violations in his community go unnoticed by his officers. They must be a bunch of incompetents. Or are they?

Think about it. Are there really enough staff to properly handle enforcement in even a medium-sized city? I live in Los Angeles. I can go weeks without seeing a policeman, halfway a parking enforcement officer (although I do seem to see them coming by just before the sweepers on street-cleaning day).

How about personal experience. I was in San Francisco the other day with my editor, and we had a meeting at City Hall. We got a great spot just in front. It was something like $3 an hour and we had about $1.50 between us. We didn’t think that would be a problem because our appointment was to last only about 20 minutes. So in we went.

We were kept waiting 15 minutes, then the meeting exploded from a “pick up an information packet” to a full-blown interview of a senior member of the city. An hour later, we made it back to the car, fully expecting to see a ticket. None there.

This happens to all of us all the time. We either don’t have all the change necessary, or we park in the “1 hour” zone and come back in an hour and a half and there is no citation. Well, if it happens to each of us say once a month and there are 100,000 vehicles in the city, that would mean that more than 1.2 million citations aren’t written every year just in that small city mentioned above. If they write 20,000 a month, that would mean 80 percent of the citations aren’t being written. Not too far off from the attention-getting number our hero above was spouting.

What does all this mean in the grand scheme of things for a city? First, it means that its parking regulations aren’t being enforced. If the laws against murder or robbery were being enforced like this, there would be a revolution.

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95% of Possible Citations