

## ***RAKING IN THE MONEY***

**We spend Winter waiting for them, Spring and Summer admiring them, and Autumn hating them.**

**Every decent-sized yard in the county has a seven- or eight-foot-deep accumulation of them by Thanksgiving. Small children have been known to be lost for days in them, and Heaven forbid you drop your car keys anywhere near them. There are sinister reports connecting lost pets and missing lawn care professionals to them.**

**By now you've probably figured out that the subject under discussion is leaves. Dead ugly crackly leaves, mostly scrub oak leaves, the ones that seem to hang around through some strange personality quirk of their own while Autumn's more respectable leaves flutter delicately earthwards and politely disappear.**

**But now we know that we almost had the deal of a lifetime!**

**A source at the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce revealed to this reporter today that a trade delegation from the Republic of Moldvorkistan had recently visited the Cape and agreed to purchase every last dead leaf that Cape residents could find. "I still don't quite believe it," says Bob Weinhafter, assistant to the Chamber's executive director. "These men were apparently serious. They wanted dead leaves, and they wanted lots of them, and they offered to pay good hard cash for them. It was like a dream where you keep finding money!"**

**"Apparently dead scrub oak leaves are an essential ingredient in 'prushpitki' or Moldvorki aphrodisiacs," explains Dr. Arnold Gwenn, professor of botany at Cape Cod Community College, who acted as scientific consultant in the negotiations with the Moldvorki business- men. "They have a way of fermenting them and adding a few other ingredients - I think yak urine might have been one -and the resultant mixture evidently turns out to be an incredibly powerful love potion that works on both human sexes and most varieties of the native cattle."**

**The Moldvorki trade delegation explained that their country's once-abundant supply of oak leaves had all but disappeared as the result of a fungus that had ravaged the country's forests. Efforts to find a suitable substitute for the precious oak leaves assumed a top-urgent status shortly after the country's leaders became aware of a serious downward trend in Moldvorkistan's once-soaring birth rate, human and bovine.**

**Happily, after extensive research by the staff at Moldvorkistan State University (11 and 3 this year and expected to be a powerhouse in their conference next season), the oak population of Cape Cod was proposed to be the closest genetic match to the Moldvorki native trees, and lab tests (conducted humanely) on "vlutni mimishniki", colloquial Moldvorki for "happy happy little mountain mice" - proved this to be the**

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case.

The prushpitki brewed from the oak leaves is also a major revenue source for the Moldvorki economy, since a considerable portion of the product is exported to appreciative neighboring countries. For this reason the identification by Moldvorki researchers of an apparently limitless supply of raw material here on the Cape has been welcomed in Moldvorkistan and throughout the region.

"They asked us about prices for the material, and at first we nearly laughed in their faces," reports the Chamber's Weinhaffer. "I mean, who pays for dead leaves? But then we saw they were serious, and somebody said 'two hundred US dollars per bag' just to see what would happen. The Moldvorkis didn't bat an eyelash. In fact I saw one of them give a little wink to his colleagues, as if to say 'Boy, did we put one over on these dummies!' "

But the concept of each Cape property owner earning \$200 a bag for his dead leaves quickly slipped from achievable reality to impossible dream once the cold hard logistical facts of life were confronted.

"The Moldvorkis told us that to make the deal work from their end, they would have to take a lot of dead leaves - and I mean a lot - in each shipment," explains the Chamber's Weinhaffer. "I don't pretend to know all the details, but they came equipped with charts and graphs and Power Points and the whole nine yards to show us what they were thinking. It was mind-boggling."

According to the Moldvorkis, getting the dead leaves from the Cape to their homeland within acceptable volume and timing parameters would necessitate construction of a bulk shipment facility somewhere on the Cape in the next two years. This facility would be designed both to store the leaves and to load them into deep-sea bulk carriers of between seventy and eighty thousand tons cargo capacity, two at a time. "The facility would look like the coal terminals down in Hampton Roads, Virginia," said Weinhaffer. "Huge ships in and out at all hours of the day or night ... we just couldn't get our minds around it."

Unfortunately, the Moldvorkis had settled on the idea that the mouth of the Bass River might be an ideal place to build this facility. "The bass is some kind of lucky fish in their country, and they thought the auspicious name would guarantee the success of the project," says Weinhaffer. "They were unpleasantly surprised when we took them for a familiarization trip, which included a dinner cruise on the Bass River. 'Surely this little stream, pleasant as it is, is not the mighty Bass River?' one of their engineers kept asking. We had to show them on a nautical chart that there's only one Bass River on the Cape, and nowhere is it more than ten feet deep. There was a lot of serious discussion in the native tongue when we got back ashore."

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In a last-ditch effort to save the deal, a Chamber committee was formed to evaluate the terminal scheme, and Captain Art Schnauzer (US Navy retired) of Wellfleet was asked to head it. "Of course we all knew what was going to happen," says Capt. Schnauzer. "First we called the Coast Guard, and the cheeky kid on the phone actually laughed at me when I told him why we were calling. Then we called the Army Corps of Engineers, and the woman answering the phone came to the conclusion that we were pranksters of some sort ... she couldn't stop giggling."

Other possibilities were examined with similar discouraging results. When the committee passed their research on to the Moldvorki delegation, its members were understandably very disappointed at the rapidly-fading prospects for their project.

As of last contact with the Moldvorkis, it appears that - unfortunately for us Cape Codders - they have now discovered some tiny deepwater port in Nova Scotia that has in place the capacity to store and ship prodigious quantities of leaves, scrub oaks being as abundant in the Canadian Maritimes as they are down here. The quality of the Canadian leaves is however not as good as our Cape Cod leaves, at least as far as the Moldvorkis are concerned. "I've been a botanist for forty years and I can't tell the difference," says Dr. Gwenn, "but then maybe I'm not looking for the same things."

The prushdorki - greatly-respected traditional experts in the production of prushpitki - reportedly plan to adjust the secret brewing formula to make up for the difference in leaf strength.

"Two hundred bucks a bag for dead leaves - it was just too good to be true," sadly comments the Cape Chamber's Weinhafter, "and we probably didn't help our cause by being greedy. When we saw that the oak leaf project was going south, we got desperate and tried to convince the Moldvorkis that Cape Cod poison ivy leaf extract might make an excellent replacement for yak urine in the prushpitki formula. They seemed politely interested, especially when we told them that we'd do a contract on the basis of a special one-time-only rate of \$300 per bag, but when they asked if we had any research that would back our claims, of course we didn't. And then we'd have the same problems about shipping the stuff. But what the heck, it was worth a shot, and anyhow we got a pretty good party night out of it because the Moldvorkis, even when they had had a lot to drink, were too polite to tell us that they never believed a word we were saying."

According to sources who attended the bogus presentation, it was at the end of the otherwise festive evening that the senior Moldvorki stood up and raised his glass for a toast. "He shouted something that we couldn't understand - it sounded like 'Shnedli pa, drufush ba,' " reported one reliable source. "Then he tossed back the drink while the entire Moldvorki trade delegation - there must have been thirty of them - were laughing hysterically, clinking glasses, and repeating that phrase over and over."

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In the meanwhile, their Cape counterparts looked on in friendly mystification.

What could be so funny about "Shnedli pa, drufush ba"? Dr. Gwenn, who was at the poison-ivy sales pitch in disguise - "so I wouldn't have to perjure myself" - hurriedly called a translator friend at Harvard on a cellphone as the Moldvorkis were chanting their mysterious refrain. The translator, reports Dr. Gwenn, burst out laughing. "He said 'Serves you guys right for trying to sell them poison ivy!' "

" 'But what does it actually mean? ' I asked him."

" 'Try this,' he said. 'Leaflets three, let it be!' "

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