

## RANDOM SAMPLES

edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

### Canadians Exhorted to Don Thinking Caps

Canadians must become more creative if their nation—currently ranked 15th among world R&D powers—is to surge into the top five, according to a new report.

Over the past 2 years, government scientists and academics have mulled their nation's future in a series of conferences on "Canadian Creativity and Innovation in the New Millennium." Now they've summed it all up in a report that calls for dispelling the image of Canadians as plodding conformists by making sweeping changes in education, industry, and science funding to foster a "culture of creativity."

First, they want the government to appoint a Task Force on Creativity, Inventiveness, Innovation, and Culture for stimulating new ideas



**Time for a new image? The backwoodsy McKenzie brothers, SCTV's contribution to Canadian stereotypes.**

"across the full spectrum of the arts, sciences, medicine, social sciences, business, industry, and technology." In Europe, the appointment of similar creativity commissars has helped get schools more oriented to problem solving, says the report's principal author, David Bentley, an English professor at the University of Western Ontario.

The report also urges universi-

ties to think outside the box—encouraging music students to study engineering, for instance, or keyboard jockeys to steep themselves in medieval history. And government should earmark funds for science that is "high-risk [and] highly likely to fail."

Such ideas come none too soon, says Gilles Rheume, vice president of the Conference Board of Canada, an economic think tank, who believes Canadian schools aren't good at grooming entrepreneurs and Canadian industry has been slow to adopt new technologies and invest in research. As a result, "our competitive situation [and] relative standard of living have been slipping."

### Psychology Furor Resolved

The editor of the *American Psychologist*, responding to a 2-week barrage of angry e-mails, has announced that he will devote an entire issue to a paper he had earlier refused to publish.

Last month, editor Richard McCarty told psychologist Scott Lilienfeld of Emory University in Atlanta that he wanted a total rewrite of a paper the journal had already accepted (*Science*, 1 June, p. 1643). The paper analyzes a 1999 controversy over a paper on child sexual abuse which got the publisher, the American Psychological Association (APA), in hot water with some politicians because it suggested not all cases were damaging to the victim.

Lilienfeld alerted colleagues to McCarty's turnabout and dozens took up the cause, complaining that the editorial process was being corrupted and that the APA was putting politics over science.

McCarty now says that "because the [editorial] confidentiality pact ... has been so thoroughly breached," he will publish Lilienfeld's paper along with many commentaries in a special issue that he hopes will vindicate his decision not to publish. Says Lilienfeld: "I'm relieved that this is all over."

## From Dust to Compost

If public opinion proves favorable, the Swedes may soon have a more environmentally friendly way of disposing of dead bodies: freezing and composting them.

A Swedish scientist has come up with a method for turning corpses into humus in a matter of weeks. "We have to face that there are problems related to conventional burial and cremation," says Susanne Wiigh-Masak, a biologist educated at Gothenburg University and a freelance environmental consultant in Lyrö. Cemeteries sometimes pose a threat to big city water supplies, she notes, and cremation emits toxic gases.

Her method involves freezing the body, then immersing it in liquid nitrogen to remove water. The 20 to 30 kilograms of fine organic powder that remain are "completely odorless and hygienic," says Wiigh-

Masak, who has done experiments with pig and cow carcasses. The remains are placed in a biodegradable coffin that disintegrates within 6 months. She says the process makes for good potting soil: She has planted roses over coffins with excellent results.

Ecologist Steen Ebbersteen of Uppsala University says the method may be a practical way to stem pollution while enriching the soil. "Ecologically speaking, it is highly desirable to replace a decomposing process that takes decades with fast, clean composting," he says.

Cost-effectiveness remains to be seen—liquid nitrogen is expensive—but there seem to be no serious political obstacles to Wiigh-Masak's scheme. She says The Church of Sweden is not offended by it, and government officials have told her that with public support, the relevant laws could easily be

changed. And support seems to be there. "I have been contacted by many individuals interested in this," says Wiigh-Masak. She hopes to see her first green burial next year.

### Tactile Astronomy

A student at the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind gets a feel for the Eskimo Nebula on a page from a new book, *Touch the Universe*, which has images from the Hubble Space Telescope overlaid with clear plastic tactile sheets for those who can't see. The NASA-funded book was written by Noreen Grice, author of an earlier book for the blind called *Touch the Stars*, and astronomer Bernhard Beck-Winchatz at DePaul University in Chicago. For more information go to [analyzer.depaul.edu/ttu](http://analyzer.depaul.edu/ttu)

