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Hashing It Out

John Friel



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Disclaimer: This is not a meal with an appetizer, salad, entree and dessert. It's a smorgasbord of leftovers from columns past. BYOB.

Good Customer Service: Nothing Fishy

A word about the well-trained staff at my favorite local GC, Stauffer's of Kissel Hill. Two of their locations are also grocery stores, with excellent seafood counters. After wavering between two species of fish, I settled on a slab of the less-expensive one. The patient counterman weighed, wrapped and labeled it.

But once home, I found he'd mislabeled it as the pricier option. I had guests to feed and no time to go back. Onto the grill it went.

Next day, label and receipt in hand, I explained the situation at the customer service desk and asked for the difference between what I'd paid and what I should have paid.

The manager apologized and tried to refund the full price. I refused. He seemed puzzled. I explained: I got what I ordered, took it home, cooked it, shared it and thoroughly enjoyed it. To accept it as a gift just because someone keyed in the wrong code would be unfair.

All I want, I said, is the difference—in store credit because I'm here to shop, not to carp. (Har!) Reluctantly—seriously, I had to talk him into it—he complied.

Don't you wish I were YOUR customer? Sure, that day. We all have our high-maintenance moments, too.

The Connected Life

A couple of years ago, amazingly, a professional tennis player stopped playing because she was "bullied" via social media. People were posting mean comments about her, and to her, on Facebook and such.

My reaction: Why react? Who cares? If someone were "bullying" me online right now, I wouldn't know. If I did, I might be annoyed or offended; but alter my behavior? Give up a (purely hypothetical) lucrative career over it? Hell, no.

Boomers don't take such stuff seriously. Sticks & stones may break our bones, but tweets and poop emojis? Meh. Unfortunately, malicious online chatter can harm businesses—restaurants, especially, but also garden centers. This is how we live now: The Internet is woven so thoroughly into daily life that we're almost never really offline. If your business isn't online, it's nowhere. Even if it's **ONLY** online, it's a Thing.

Online and offline aren't discrete entities. They're inseparable structural members of reality's whole. Life's increasingly infrequent cell-free, wifi-less interludes, like float trips on remote streams, are precious; but I'll admit to occasional uneasiness when unconnected. We live in an age when a guy freezing to death on Everest can (and did) call his wife via satellite to say goodbye. Lucky her.

On the Limits of Focus Groups and Crowdsourced Planning

"A survey can't tell you what people might buy in the future, if it happened to be available."—Claude Hope

"If I'd asked people what they wanted, they'd have said 'Faster horses.'"—Henry Ford

The Eponymous Garden

The variety names of some of our favorite perennials and grasses have stories to tell. Most such eponyms' roots are not contemporary, but historical; like *Calamagrostis* Karl Foerster or *Echinacea* Magnus, they honor some legendary plantsperson.

So it feels like a rare privilege to have known the humans behind a plant as prominent as Phlox David, a Perennial Plant of the Year. Discovered in Pennsylvania, it was named by Brandywine Conservancy director F. M. Mooberry for her husband. I met and chatted with the Mooberrys at a wedding. Both have since left us; as of last year, they're horticultural history. But I dined with Phlox David. **GP**

John Friel is marketing manager for Emerald Coast Growers and a freelance writer.