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Short stuff for kids

A look at what's making news in May – from a \$1 million baseball to elephant artists.

Would you like cheese with that?

It's May, which means that it's National Hamburger Month! Did you know that the average American consumes more than 134, four-ounce hamburgers every year? That, according to a survey, is more than the combined number of hot dogs, pizza, and chocolate consumed – making the hamburger one of America's favorite foods.

Here are some fun facts to celebrate the popular patties:

- In 1921, White Castle in Wichita, Kan., became one of the first fast-food restaurant chains to serve hamburgers.
- Some say the world's largest hamburger was created at Burger Fest, a festival in Seymour, Wis., on Aug. 4, 2001. It weighed in at a whopping 8,266 pounds cooked.
- In 2006, Japanese hot dog-eating champion Kobayashi ate 97 hamburgers in eight minutes, setting a world record.

Going, going, gone

About \$1 million. That's how much Barry Bonds' eventual 756th home-run ball may be worth to the fan who retrieves it, according to the Dallas auction house that is offering the seven-figure bounty for the historic ball.

Bonds, an outfielder for the San Francisco Giants, is just 11 homers shy of breaking Hank Aaron's all-time record of 755 home runs.

"The baseball that sets the mark could truly be considered 'priceless,' but we expect that \$1 million will be very tempting to the fan who catches that ball," says Chris Ivy, of Heritage Auction Galleries.

So, the next time you go to a Giants game, don't forget to bring your baseball glove – or bring two, one for each hand!

Kids' games

Long before most of the young readers of this column sent their first e-mail to a friend or surfed the Web, KidsCom.com was a place one could go for a game of tick-tack-toe.

Boy, have things have changed in 12 years. Today the site, which draws visitors from some 122 different countries, has dozens of interactive games for kids of all ages (and adults, too).

Jori Clarke, founder, says the Internet is different from what it was in 1995, when KidsCom.com was created. For one, "the Internet used to be passive," she says, "but now [kids] can be involved. They can click and choose, upload content, and provide opinions."

Kids also can create and customize virtual houses and "avatars." Avatars are online images or "people" – something Ms. Clarke refers to as "Mini Me's"). Kids can choose their clothes as well as skin, hair, and eye color. Cool, right?

So what's next for the Web?

"Games that have a social purpose," she says. So KidsCom.com created one about global climate change. The hope, of course, is that kids will have fun and learn about factors that may affect the environment.

To play this and other games online, visit www.kidscom.com.

Arty elephants

For years, Katya Arnold has been teaching art to children in New York – and to Asian elephants in Thailand. Some elephants draw abstract swirls of various colors. Others actually paint trees and flowers.

It takes about two weeks to a year to teach an elephant to paint, says David Ferris, director of the Asian Elephant Art & Conservation Project, which was founded about 10 years ago.

At the time, new forest-protection laws in Thailand meant many elephants had lost their jobs dragging heavy logs. They needed new "careers."

A group of artists decided to open painting schools for elephants in Thailand and other Asian countries. So far, about 100 elephants have had a brush with artistic expression through the program. Their artwork can be seen online at www.elephantart.com and in Ms. Arnold's book for kids age 3 to 7, "Elephants Can Paint Too!" (Atheneum/Anne Schwartz Books; \$16.95).

How good are these animal artists? More than 42,000 people attended an elephant-art exhibit in Australia in 2001, Mr. Ferris said. And last year, a large mural painted by six elephants sold for a record amount – \$35,000.

That's not exactly peanuts.

- *Compiled from websites and wire reports by Steven Ellis.*

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