

## PARENTS TALK BACK Time for a digital detox

A year ago, Tony Krieg, 43, witnessed a scene in a restaurant that changed his retirement plans. He watched as parents brought their young son to a Texas Roadhouse restaurant for a birthday party. The parents steered the boy, who looked to be about 9 years old, by guiding him from the back of his head while he stared down at his iPad.

"Not once did that little boy look up" through the entire party, he said. After that encounter, Krieg sold the St. Louis-area electronics-recycling business he had run for 18 years and purchased his dream property: a 167-acre farm in Dittmer, Missouri.

He's decided to use that farm to invite families to spend a day away from their devices and learn a little bit about life away from constant connectivity.

"The goal is to get kids off electronics and show them there is a life outside of that, especially in the outdoors," he said. There will be fishing, hiking, arrowhead hunting and creek exploring, along with short presentations on topics like recycling, composting and gardening.

Calling the effort Missouri Kids Unplugged, Krieg has filed it as a nonprofit, set up a website (missourikidsunplugged.zone) and planned a fundraiser for March to cover some expenses. Last year, he estimates spending between \$12,000 to \$15,000 out of pocket so that 400 people could visit and take part in activities at the farm. He also provided food and some entertainment. He and his family want to try to offer the visits for free to thousands of children, including inner-city kids who may never have been to a farm before.

He and his wife have four children, ages 16 to 23, and they have always enforced some rules around technology use.

"We're not talking about living off the grid," he said. "We're talking about common sense boundaries. Let's have families again."

Ronald Dahl, professor of community health and human development at the University of California, Berkeley, spoke recently about adolescent brain development at a seminar for education writers. I asked him about the long-term impact of screen-saturated childhoods on teenage brains.

The jury is still out on what those impacts will be, he said. But there are two areas in which experts agree that a high-volume tech habit has negative effects: sleep and attention span. Adolescents get less quality sleep and have shorter attention spans when they spend a lot of time on digital devices. Recent studies suggest adults suffer the same consequences.

Some adults will recognize signs of their own dependence and take social media vacations; I've seen people announce such breaks on Facebook and Twitter. I've even tried this myself.

I wrote about a Facebook fast in 2010. After officially announcing my big breakup, our separation lasted less than a week.

Lately, I've been craving a few days in a cabin deep in the woods, cut off from Wi-Fi, cellphone towers and television. We are social creatures built for connection, but we also need a periodic disconnect. We need a pause to honestly evaluate how much time we spend truly disconnected from a device.

Perhaps a better approach to a short-term detox is to integrate regular downtime and make it part of a family's routine. Think beyond just taking a break from technology during meal times. Is it possible to do screen-free Sundays, where a block of time -- anywhere from four to eight hours -- is set aside? It would take some coordination to find hours that work for everyone. That's also key.

Too many family tech-detox plans start as a group effort, only to see the parents break down first, using "work" as an ever-present hall pass. Change has to be modeled from the top down.

My own family will be trying a digital detox soon. Rather than making this a punitive exercise, I want my kids to identify what benefits they each stand to gain: better sleep, more focused attention, more face-to-face activities.

The larger goal is about becoming more mindful of our tech use and media consumption, and building in regular breaks.

I agree with Krieg's observation that something valuable is lost unless we make an active effort to disengage with things and engage with one another.

He talked about the students who visited his property last year who had never in their lives walked on gravel in a creek. Some had never cooked a hot dog over an open fire or made a s'more.

"It's ironic that I owned an electronics recycling business," he said. Proving that what goes around, comes around.

Aisha Sultan is a St. Louis-based journalist who studies parenting in the digital age while trying to keep up with her tech-savvy children. Find her on Twitter: @AishaS.



AISHA SULTAN  
Parents talk back

# Time for resolutions big and small

By LEANNE ITALIE  
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Sure, sure, sure. You're gonna quit smoking, lose weight, get organized and work for world peace in 2016.

And we're pulling for you. We really are. You can do it!

New Year's resolutions come as big strokes and small victories, along with a high rate of failure. Is it best to reach for the stars or make a petite promise? We asked a few folks about their plans to do better, go bigger or simply baby step it outside the box next year.

## Seven marathons in seven days

You heard it right. Aimee Shilling, a 35-year-old mother of four in East Canton, Ohio, has signed up to run seven marathons in seven days come October. And she'll be doing it to raise money for World Vision's "run for water" program.

Clean water initiatives have been a goal since she took a mission trip to Jamaica in 2000. Running has been a passion since she joined the cross-country team in high school. She's a regular marathoner and ultra-marathoner, rising at 4 a.m. at least three days a week to run with friends, returning home to get her kids up and ready for school.

Shilling has done back-to-back marathons before, but never seven consecutively. The new year aside, she made a promise to herself long ago to run 40 marathons or ultra-marathons before her 40th birthday. The seventh race in her 7-in-7 series would be her 40th, so she's ahead of schedule.



Debbie Tallman via AP

This April 26 photo shows Aimee Shilling, right, and husband Todd Shilling standing with their children, Caleb, Micahiah, from left, Gabriel and Tabitha, in Canton, Ohio, after the Pro Football Hall of Fame Marathon. Aimee ran the marathon and resolves in the new year to run seven more in seven consecutive days.

"As long as I can start the series healthy, I'm pretty confident. None of them will be fast," Shilling laughed.

## Social walkabouts

Jarone Ashkenazi is a lifelong Los Angelino, but at 26 he considers himself "someone who is more introspective by nature." Hence, he's been reluctant to grab his city by the tail.

"I thrive in new settings and environments," Ashkenazi said, "it's just at times I'm too hesitant to put myself out there."

That will hopefully change with his new spreadsheet. He has broken up his get-out-of-the-house goals into categories: activities, concerts, restaurants, bars, outdoors and nightlife. He got an early start with a couple of hikes.

Among his first adventures come 2016: The Broad contem-

porary art museum, an evening stroll through the holiday lights at the Getty Center and the Chill at The Queen Mary (think winter wonderland under a giant dome).

So what took him so long? "While I was younger I was too naive to think of all this city has to offer," Ashkenazi said, "and now that I'm older I want to take full advantage of everything."

## Zero waste

Aspiring to this lifestyle is lofty. Aspiring to this lifestyle with a baby is loftier. Say hello to Meredith Bay Tyack in Burlington, Vermont.

The pursuit for the 30-year-old began with the birth of her daughter a year ago.

"Cloth diapering was really the catalyst for us. We started purging plastic and disposable items from our life left and



Lavinia Lumezanu via AP

This Dec. 20 photo shows Jarone Ashkenazi on the Escondido Canyon Trail in Malibu, Calif. His new year's resolution is to break out and get more active around Los Angeles.

right," she said.

She and her husband already use a plastic-free water filtration system, with charcoal that can be composted after six months. She stopped buying paper towels and eliminated numerous other small plastic and disposable items.

"But I'm still staring at a full garbage each week and it's frustrating," Bay Tyack said. "We're mindful consumers. We shop at our farmer's market and yet we're still producing so much garbage."

She's still using plastic garbage bags, for instance.

"A zero waste lifestyle is an exciting prospect for me because while I can't control many things, I can control myself and the small environment I inhabit," she said. "Maybe I won't clean up the oceans on my own, but at least I know I will not be contributing additional waste."

## OUT OF THE VAULT

# Irrigation feud leads to silent shootout in Echo

An Echo farmer in 1920 who held a neighbor at gunpoint over an irrigation disagreement — and made him pay for the gun — later died in a shootout with local authorities.

W.H. Smith, a bachelor farmer thought to be about 65 years old, had been farming property near Echo known as the Spike place for a number of years. On June 10, 1920, Smith began to threaten his neighbor, Joe Ramos, who farmed across a shared irrigation canal from Smith and who had control of the gates regulating the water supply. Smith had conceived of a notion to kill Ramos the day before, making threats to that effect to all who would listen, and had scared off the Echo



RENEE STRUTHERS  
Out of the vault

marsh sent to arrest him. Smith went into Echo and purchased a Colt special revolver and cartridges. He then went to the Ramos place and held his neighbor at gunpoint while forcing him to write him a check for \$53.40 — \$10 for damages to his land and \$43.40 for the gun and ammunition. Smith then told Ramos he would kill him if he told the police or attempted to stop payment on the check. After Smith left, Ramos traveled to Pendleton to report the threats to the district attorney's office.

An employee of Smith, Everett Thompson, tried for two days to encourage his employer to forget his feud with Ramos and give himself up to the authorities, but Smith swore he had nothing to live for and that lawmen would never take him alive.

Thompson was working in a nearby field when Deputy Sheriff Joe Blakley of Pendleton and Asa Thomson of Echo showed up to arrest Smith on June 10. Blakley and Thomson had agreed on a peaceable arrest, but Smith saw the two men coming as he worked in a box near a gate in his irrigation ditch. Smith grabbed his revolver and shot twice at Thomson, who was carrying a high-powered rifle, from about 45 yards away.

Thomson returned fire and killed Smith. The incident happened so fast Deputy Blakley couldn't even draw his weapon before it was over, and none of the three men spoke a single word, according to Thompson.

A coroner's inquiry after the shooting cleared Thomson of any wrong-doing, saying he had fired in self-defense. Because of his sudden hatred of Ramos and his defiance of the authorities, Echo residents theorized Smith had had some kind of mental breakdown.

Renee Struthers is the Community Records Editor for the East Oregonian. See the complete collection of Out of the Vault columns at [eovault.blogspot.com](http://eovault.blogspot.com)

## ODDS & ENDS

### UK astronaut Tim Peake calls wrong number from space

LONDON (AP) — Anyone can dial a wrong number, but it's not often done from outer space.

British astronaut Tim Peake tweeted an apology on Christmas Day from the International Space Station after calling a wrong number.

He wrote "I'd like to apologize to the lady I just called by mistake saying 'Hello, is this planet Earth?' — not a prank call — just a wrong number!"

The 43-year-old former army helicopter pilot did not say who he was calling.

### Vets remove toys from puppy's tummy

LEVITTOWN, Pa. (AP) — A Philadelphia puppy is getting back to his bouncy self after two plastic squeaky toys were removed from his stomach.

Doctors at Veterinary Specialty & Emergency Center in Levittown say the only sign that 6-month-old Jasper was having problems was he couldn't keep food down. He otherwise seemed energetically normal.

They say X-rays showed the two balls were taking up most of the space in the Cane Corso's stomach.

Dr. Scott Joudrey, who surgically removed the red-and-green balls on Saturday, says "dogs eat crazy things."

In the last year, the suburban Philadelphia practice treated a bulldog named Elvis that ate three pacifiers and a mixed-breed dog that scarfed down a pair of calf-high boots.



AP Photo/Dmitry Lovetsky, File

In this Dec. 15 photo, British astronaut Tim Peake gestures prior the launch of Soyuz TMA-19M space ship at the Russian leased Baikonur cosmodrome, Kazakhstan.

Jasper's owner, Michael Ehrlich, of Philadelphia, says he thinks the dog swallowed the toys weeks ago.

### Bipedal bear spotted, appears to be healthy

WEST MILFORD, N.J. (AP) — New Jersey wildlife officials say there's been a sighting of a bear that walks upright on its two hind legs, and has become a social media darling.

Fans of the bipedal bear nicknamed Pedals had grown concerned when the animal had not been seen for several weeks.

Pedals apparently has an injured leg or paw that doesn't allow it to walk comfortably on all fours, experts say.

But officials tell NJ.com a resident saw Pedals in West Milford on Dec. 21 and said the bear appeared to be in good health. The caller estimated Pedals weighs roughly 350

pounds. The bear first gained fame after it was spotted last year ambling around neighborhoods and was caught on videos that were posted on social media and played on national television. Since then, animal activists voiced concern that the bear's health has declined and they fear it might not survive a harsh winter. They also doubt the bear can run, climb or defend itself, or even eat properly.

Supporters hope Pedals can be moved to a sanctuary in New York state, but New Jersey officials have said they won't allow the bear to be transported out of state. They have said they want to examine the bear before making any decisions about it, and they don't plan to try to capture the animal.

"As we've been saying all along, the bear seems to be doing fine on its own," Department of Environmental

Protection spokesman Larry Hajna said. "This is really good news for the bear and all the people following his travels.

"This sighting is really encouraging," Hajna added. "By virtue of the fact that the bear hasn't been seen for some time indicates to us that he has been out in the woods foraging. There are plenty of tree nuts available. We now have a basis to determine the bear is OK. He may be heading into his denning period now."

### Fight breaks out at New Jersey anti-violence demonstration

NEWARK, N.J. (AP) — An anti-violence demonstration in Newark, New Jersey, devolved into a physical altercation between two activists.

NJ.com reports the small crowd began arguing on the steps of Newark City Hall on Wednesday about the city's attempts to curb violence.

The demonstration was organized by two anti-violence groups.

They say they wanted to urge Mayor Ras Baraka to put his "quality of life plan" into action to help address violence in the city. A group of Baraka supporters appeared and an argument ensued.

At one point, one man put his hands around another's neck and pushed him to the ground.

Organizers and other participants said the skirmish lasted only a few minutes, and there were no serious injuries.

Baraka says the scuffle is being investigated by Newark police and called it "disheartening."