



Snake hunter Amy Siewe pulls out a dead python from a plastic bag in the backyard of a house in Delray Beach.



Brian Wood makes snake skin face masks inside his workshop in Delray Beach.



Snake hunter Jim McCartney pulls out a live Iguana from a cage in Delray Beach.—AFP photos



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MAKING MASKS FROM FLORIDA PYTHON SKIN



A dead python is kept inside a cool box at the backyard of a house in Delray Beach.

A Florida craftsman has come up with a novel way of tackling both the coronavirus pandemic and the problem of invasive pythons and iguanas that damage the state's fragile ecosystem. Brian Woods, the 63-year-old owner of All American Gator Products, has turned his hand to designing face masks made out of reptile skin. "I took something that's very serious and turned it into a fashion statement," he said at his workshop in Dania Beach, 25 miles (40 kilometers) north of Miami.

Woods got his inspiration from a curious source — a meme he saw of a horse wearing a woman's bra as a face mask. He asked his wife if he could borrow one of hers to test if the concept would work. He now sells python skin face masks on his Facebook page for \$90. Snake hunter Amy Siewe arrived at Woods' home with

a giant python for skinning. "They're wreaking havoc on the Everglades," she said, referring to the vast wetlands that occupy much of southern Florida. "They get to be between 18 and 20 feet (5.5 to 6 meters) long and they eat everything from rats to deer."

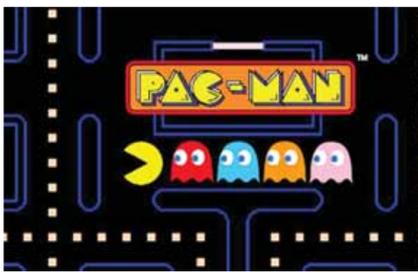
The pythons were probably introduced to Florida as exotic pets toward the end of the last century and released into the Everglades, where they have no predators. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission pays hunters a bounty to capture the snakes. Iguanas likely also came to Florida as pets before being released into the wild, where they thrive in the balmy climate.—AFP

Gobble gobble: Pac-Man turns 40

Forty years ago, a new video game featuring a bright yellow, dot-chomping, ghost-dodging character called Pac-Man appeared in Tokyo. It would become the most successful arcade game of all time. The hero — shaped like a mouth opening and closing — races around a maze noisily gobbling dots and occasionally fruit for extra points, all the while avoiding four cunning ghosts named Blinky, Pinky, Inky and Clyde.

As every Pac-Man player knows, the greatest joy comes from turning the tables by munching a power pellet, sending the ghosts fleeing in all directions as they suddenly become edible themselves. The game was originally called Puck-Man (an onomatopoeic play on the Japanese word "paku", meaning to gobble) but it was changed when it launched in the United States for fear gamers would inevitably change the "P" to an "F".

Game designer Toru Iwatani came up with the shape for the adorable hero when he took a small slice from a pizza and realised the remainder looked like a wide-open mouth. Pac-Man was aimed at women and couples — a different audience to the violent alien shoot-em-ups popular in Japanese arcades at the time, Iwatani explained in a 2010 interview with Wired magazine.



The first edition was placed in a cinema in the trendy Tokyo district of Shibuya rather than a male-dominated arcade to test the target audience, he said. "The women and couples were very happy about the machine, very excited. They came up to it and put their hands on it, so we thought that our target concept had been very much in sync and correct," he said.

Hard-core gamers turned up their noses but "it was for people who didn't play games on a daily basis — women, children, the elderly". The idea of Pac-Man turning the tables on his spooky tormentors came from the cartoon series Popeye, where the nautical hero is only able to take on his nemesis Bluto after a healthy dose of spinach, Iwatani explained.

'Tremendously monotonous'

From these humble beginnings, Pac-Man would go on to be recognised by Guinness World Records as the most successful coin-operated arcade game of all time. It has spawned several spin-offs, including "Pac 'n Roll", "Ms. Pac-Man", "Pac-in-Time" and "Pac Panic" — a massive money spinner for creators Bandai Namco.

The firm claims the loveable character has a brand recognition of 90 percent around the world — "one of the most recognised on the planet". To celebrate the game's 30th birthday, Google unveiled its first-ever playable "Doodle" and the internet giant also rolled out a version of the game for its Maps service — turning the real streets of a city into a labyrinth to gobble up pellets and ghosts. According to Wired, the "perfect score" is 3,333,360 points — possible only by getting to the final level 256 without losing a life and eating every dot, fruit and ghost possible. "It was tremendously monotonous," Wired quoted the first record-holder, Billy Mitchell, as saying. Pac-Man's 40th was celebrated with a special Twitter hashtag in Japan, with fans all over the country wishing their hero a happy birthday. "The characters are colourful and cute. It was so fun. I remember I played a lot at my relative's house. Happy birthday Pac-Man!" said one.—AFP

Renowned Egyptian sculptor Adam Henein dies at 91

Prominent Egyptian sculptor Adam Henein, who led the restoration of the Great Sphinx in Giza, died on Friday at the age of 91, the culture ministry announced. The acclaimed artist, who passed away after a struggle with illness, leaves behind a rich legacy of artwork, much of which draws inspiration from Egyptian heritage. "The Egyptian visual arts scene lost a genius," Culture Minister Inas Abdel-Dayem said in a statement, describing Henein as "unique". Henein was born in 1929 in the Bab al-Shaaria district in Cairo to a family of silversmiths and jewellers.

He demonstrated artistic talent from an early age, modelling a clay figure of ancient Egyptian King Ramses II at eight years old. "My father used to display my work in the window of his silver workshop and it received wide acclaim," Henein said in a 2019

documentary by the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. Henein studied at Cairo's School of Fine Arts, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in 1953. He continued his studies in Munich and later lived in Paris for more than two decades before returning to Egypt. In the 1990s, he led the team that restored the Great Sphinx at the Giza plateau near Egypt's famed pyramids.

Henein's home in Giza, which was converted into a museum, boasts a variety of paintings and sculptures. In 1996, he founded the annual Aswan International Sculpture Symposium (AISS), which draws artists from around the world. Henein's work has been exhibited in Egypt, Europe and beyond and he received many awards, including the Egyptian State Merit Award for arts in 1998 and the Mubarak Art Award in 2014.—AFP



Egyptian sculptor Adam Henein

Phantom lock picker of Paris parks becomes folk hero

A mysterious figure who picks the locks of Paris parks at night for people who have been cooped up in the city's tiny apartments has become something of a folk hero. Parks have been chained up in Europe's most densely populated capital since the coronavirus lockdown began more than eight weeks ago. Despite the city's mayor Anne Hidalgo pleading with the government to allow them to reopen if people wore masks, ministers have been unmoved.

But as temperatures nudged towards 30 degrees Celsius (86 degrees Fahrenheit) this week, an amateur lock-picker admitted that he has been opening parks at night to let hard-pressed Parisians sit on the grass and smell the roses. A man calling himself "Jose" told the Parisien daily that he has been liberating parks in the poorer districts of northern and eastern Paris in a series of "Batman" style nocturnal actions. Two hand-

written posters hanging from the railings of the Parc de Belleville on Friday said "Thank you, Jose!", seeming to show that the phantom locker picker has generated a following. Discontent with the closure of parks has been rising since France began to slowly relax its lockdown last week, with the police forced to clear the huge open lawns in front of Les Invalides in central Paris of picnickers twice in two days.

Exodus

Officers had earlier dispersed hundreds of people from the banks of Canal Saint-Martin. Jose, who claims he only picks locks as a hobby and makes an honest living from a "normal job", said: "Paris apartments are very small. We are supposed to be coming out of lockdown, but everything is closed." Almost a quarter of Paris's population escaped the city—often to second homes in the country—during the strictest period of the confinement.

But the city's poor and essential workers were stuck in often tiny flats during one of the sunniest springs on record. Hidalgo, who is fighting a re-election campaign, asked the government to treat parks like the city's streets and allow people to "stroll through them if they were wearing a mask, which should be obligatory". But Health Minister Olivier Veran said the parks should stay shut as long as Paris and its surroundings remain in the "red zone" of infections.—AFP



A Palestinian baker shows trays of traditional date-filled biscuits at a bakery in Jerusalem's Old City ahead of Eid Al-Fitr, a three-day holiday that marks the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.—AFP

Italian woman wins \$1.1 million Picasso in charity draw

An Italian woman has won a Picasso painting worth more than \$1 million in a charity raffle to raise money for village water projects in Africa. The winner of Wednesday's draw at Christie's auction house in Paris was named as Claudia Borgogno, who was gifted the winning ticket. Her prize is Picasso's 1921 oil painting "Nature Morte" (Still Life), which is signed and dated by the artist. The Spanish master's geometric composition representing a piece of newspaper and a glass of absinthe had been valued at one million euros (\$1.1 million).

The "1 Picasso for 100 euros" project organised by French charity Aider les Autres (Help the Others) aims to raise funds for various humanitarian projects. This year's draw, the second with a Picasso prize, was to raise funds for the poverty-fighting agency CARE to finance projects improving access to water for 200,000 villagers in Morocco, Cameroon and Madagascar. More than 51,000 people bought a 100 euro ticket through the project website, raising 5.1 million euros, though far short of the original target of 20 million.

Tickets were bought by people in more than 100 countries, with the majority in France, the United States and Switzerland. "Twenty million euros was very ambitious. With more than five million we achieved an exceptional result for a very complicated operation in a very complicated period," CARE communications director Emanuela Croce told AFP. "We had to reassure that it was a real operation with a real Picasso, it seemed too good to be true."

She welcomed that people had realised "water is crucial for health" during the coronavirus pandemic, which had delayed the draw which was originally due to take place in March. "It is all the more important as one in three people on Earth does not have access to drinking water," she said. The painting's owner, billionaire art collector David Nahmad, will be paid 900,000 euros and the remaining 4.2 million will finance the CARE projects. The first "1 Picasso for 100 euros" raffle in 2013 raised funds to benefit a project in the ancient Lebanese city of Tyre, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The winner was American Jeffrey Gonano from Pennsylvania, who took home Picasso's 1914 work "L'Homme au Gibus" (Man With Opera Hat), valued at more than \$1 million in 2013.—AFP