

Product Placement 2: The Sequel

“Dear Ndugu: Hope you enjoy the *Contingencies* subscription . . .”

It could be a parlor game, like “Where’s Waldo”: See how many American Academy of Actuaries *objets* you can spot in Jack Nicholson’s recent movie, *About Schmidt*.

As you may recall (Inside Track, March/April 2002), Nicholson plays Warren Schmidt, an actuary in Omaha, Neb., who discovers retirement to be more of a challenge than his career ever was.

Almost two years ago, the filmmakers asked the Academy if we had any “actuarial stuff” they could use to dress the sets. We sent them a carton full of publications, posters, mugs, and other Academy doodads, not knowing how (or even if) the film’s production designer would use any of it. For all we knew, it would all end up sealed inside those cartons stacked in Warren’s bare office, the film’s opening scene.

But it turns out we did better than that. Warren may not be the brightest actuary who ever came down the pike, but he’s dedicated enough to bring all his Academy stuff home with him. I’ll let you have the fun of finding it all yourself. Suffice it to say that *Contingencies* probably gets the most screen time. (Though what Jack thought about those articles on DC plans in Japan, securitization in Canada, and the workers’ comp crisis—*Entertainment Tonight* never thought to ask.)

I’d also like to take this opportunity to welcome Noam Segal, our new puzzles maven—who actually started last issue, but what with the holidays and all . . .

Noam is an actuary working for William Penn Life In-

surance Co. of New York. He lives in Great Neck on the North Shore of Long Island, has three children, and plays a variety of stringed instruments in a klezmer band.

He attributes his love of math to an elementary-school teacher who taught him how to calculate irrational square roots when he was 9 years old. Ever since then, he’s been smitten with mathematics in general and with what he calls “recreational math” in particular.

“Basically, I’ve loved mathematical puzzles for as long as I can remember,” he says. “Some of the great mathematical ideas have actually started by asking puzzling recreational questions.”

By alternating challenging but accessible conundrums with the real head-bangers, Segal hopes the *Contingencies* puzzles page will appeal to inveterate die-hards like himself as well as the neophytes who haven’t yet discovered how much fun puzzles can be.

“The previous puzzle editors have been wonderful,” he says. “I’ve been delighted, and sometimes had to stretch my brain with their superb puzzles. Michael Shackelford has been really inspirational, and Alan Goldberg was also a wonderfully devoted puzzler. I hope to live up to their legacy.”

No doubt he will—if those anguished cries of frustration emanating from actuarial offices all across the country are anything to go by. At any rate, we’re glad to have him.



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Contingencies

Volume 15 / Number 2 PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ACTUARIES

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Contingencies (ISSN 1048-9851) is published bimonthly by the American Academy of Actuaries, 1100 Seventeenth Street, NW, Seventh Floor, Washington, DC 20036. For subscription information and customer service, contact the *Contingencies* Subscription Department at the address above or (202) 223-8196. Advertising offices: Mohanna & Associates, Inc., (972) 596-8777, dawnette@mohanna.com. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and at additional mailing offices. BPA circulation audited. (Basic annual subscription rate is included in dues. Nonmember rate is \$24.)

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Postmaster: Please send change-of-address notices for *Contingencies* to Prima Fulfillment, P.O. Box 7225, Bensenville, IL 60106-7225.

