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## elemental

### 'SMART' PILL HAS A LOT OF MUSCLE

Scientists are flexing their skills in creating "smart" medical implants covered with tiny artificial muscles. They are testing implantable capsules perforated with micro-scope holes. Designed to dispense medicine, the holes are guarded by a ring of artificial plastic muscle that expands and contracts.

The pills, which would be implanted beneath the skin rather than swallowed, could be used to deliver insulin to diabetics, according to researchers at Ohio State University. The muscles would work with sensors and shrink away from the holes on the pill, allowing medicine to pass into the bloodstream. When the capsule runs out of medicine, it could be removed and replaced during outpatient surgery. The concept still must go through clinical trials before being considered by the Food and Drug Administration.

"It's smart," materials scientist Marc Madou says of the pill. "It gives only the amount of drug that the body needs."

### FEVER, MURDER OR JUST BAD MEAT?

For 200 years scholars have speculated that composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart died of rheumatic fever, although common myths blame a rival, Antonio Salieri. Now, a medical research offers another culprit: bad meat.

Mozart's symptoms — fever, rash and swollen limbs — are consistent with trichinosis from eating raw pork, noted researcher Jan V. Hirschmann of the Puget Sound Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Seattle.

Hirschmann thinks that Mozart had eaten tainted or undercooked pork within a few weeks before his death Dec. 5, 1791. Trichinosis can have an incubation period of up to 50 days.

"Muscle pain sometimes becomes so pronounced that patients, refusing to move, appear paralyzed," Hirschmann wrote in a recent issue of *Archives of Internal Medicine*. "Deaths typically occur in the third week of illness, from pneumonia or from neurological or cardiac complications."

News briefs compiled by Kurt Loft, Media General News Service.

## site

### BYTES

### SKELETONS IN THE CLOSET

Donald Johanson discovered one of the oldest human skeletal remains in 1974. Lucy, as she was named, is special because she lived so long ago (32 million years) and because almost half of her skeleton was found. Most fossil finds are just fragments — sometimes a tooth or a piece of a skull. Not far from where Lucy was found, another significant find was made by Johanson. "The First Family" is a group of fossils that originated from at least 13 individuals who died over a period of many years. For more information on these fossils, visit [cgl.pbs.org/wgbh/aso/tryit/evolution/lucy.html](http://cgl.pbs.org/wgbh/aso/tryit/evolution/lucy.html)

## Annual Webby Awards recognize outstanding sites in a variety of categories

People don't surf the Web anymore — at least not like they once did.

When it was smaller, less commercial and more raw, traveling the Web was like a Sunday drive — the destination wasn't nearly as important as just getting away and enjoying the scenery.

The Web's just too big, too useful, too refined for that now. People tend to stick with what they know, spending most of their time at portals like Yahoo and MSN, shopping sites like eBay and Amazon, and news and entertainment sites like ESPN and CNN. But here's a great opportunity to stray

from the routine: Check out some award-winning sites nominated for Webby Awards at [www.webbyawards.com](http://www.webbyawards.com).

Five nominated sites in each of 27 categories competed for the fifth annual Webby Awards, announced last month in San Francisco.

The Webby Awards were judged on content, structure and navigation, visual design, functionality, interactivity, and overall user experience by a panel of

experts. In addition, a People's Voice award, determined by online votes, was given in each category.

ACCESSORIZE IE: Some of the best features of Internet Explorer 5 aren't included in the default installation.

The free Web accessories kit for IE 5 is chock full of useful tools for making your Web wanderings more enjoyable and productive.

Most of the features are activated by right-clicking on an item in the browser and choosing the appropriate command.

My favorite is the Open Frame in New Window utility. If you've ever tried to read something boxed in by a frame that is too small, you'll love this one, too. Just right-click anywhere in the frame that interests you and select Open Frame in New Window from the context menu. That frame

will open in a full browser window, giving you plenty of space.

Other useful features include:

• Zoom In on small images to get a better look, then easily zoom back out.

• Image Toggle allows you to turn off images for extra speed, and turn them back on again, even more quickly and easily. Look for Toggle Images in the Links bar and click it.

• Text Highlighter lets you highlight text in a document. This one doesn't do much for me, but some find it useful for reading long documents.

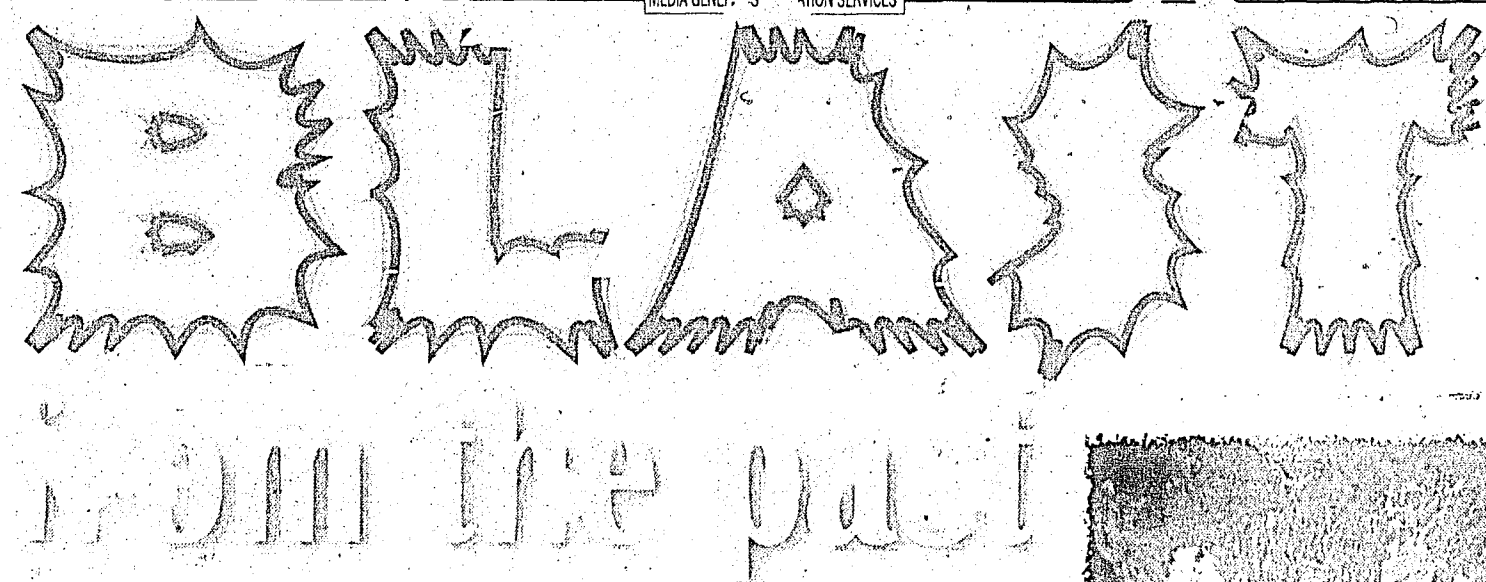
• Web Search gives you the ability to select keywords on a Web page.

right-click, and send those words straight to a search engine. Look ma, no typing!

Image List is particularly handy if you have your own Web site. It displays all the images, their sizes and how long they'll take to download at various connection speeds. You'll find the 131 KB download at [www.microsoft.com/Windows/IE/WebAccess/ie5.asp](http://www.microsoft.com/Windows/IE/WebAccess/ie5.asp).

Don't forget to write Mark D. Stanley at [markd@stanley.com](mailto:markd@stanley.com) or The Tampa Tribune, P.O. Box 191, Tampa, FL 33601.

## science technology



Scientists continue to gain valuable information from a volcano 10 years after the most cataclysmic eruption in nearly a century

By Kurt Loft

MEDIA GENERAL NEWS SERVICE

It was one of history's most violent explosions, a geologic belch felt 'round the world.

Today, 10 years after the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines, scientists still study the effects of this monster event, which offered valuable information about how volcanoes behave and their effects on land and atmosphere.

Pinatubo was an event of global scale. When the volcano blew its top in June 1991, it killed 270 people, made 250,000 homeless, destroyed two of the largest U.S. military bases in Asia, and obliterated much of the island of Luzon. The explosion injected into the air 20 million tons of sulfur dioxide, which reacted with water to form sulfuric acid droplets.

The most cataclysmic eruption in nearly a century changed the dynamics of the atmosphere and cooled temperatures around the world, says Chip Trepte, an atmospheric scientist at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Langley Research Center in Virginia.

"We learned that Pinatubo had a very strong effect on the atmosphere, and it lasted not for months but for several years," he says by telephone. "It changed the circulation of the upper atmosphere and the amount of energy that reached Earth's surface. It also changed the way energy was released back out to space."

Scientists use Pinatubo as a model to study changes in the stratosphere, a layer of atmosphere extending from about 6 miles up to 30 miles up. At this altitude, there are no clouds

to wash out pollutants, which can remain circling the world for years and possibly decades.

Pinatubo created a hot cloud of gas 22 miles high — the ideal eruption, says Jerry Meehl, a climatologist with the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Colorado. "Pinatubo is an important volcano in terms of the quality of observations and the way that data is used," he says. "It was the best-observed volcanic eruption, in terms of climate effects, in history."

Climatologists work with computer models, constantly adding new information to study the long-term changes in the atmosphere. Pinatubo added a burst that spiked that model, and scientists now can make comparisons that help them better understand natural and human influences on the environment.

"Volcanoes put a lot of stuff into the stratosphere that can produce global cooling, but we don't have a lot of good observations," Meehl adds. "Pinatubo was a large explosion and produced a significant global climate effect, so we were able to get really good observations about what was speeded into the atmosphere. It's helped us reconstruct a history of past volcanoes that we can put into a [long-term] climate model."

For geologists, Pinatubo also offered a wealth of scientific data. After the eruption, intense, heat-driven wind blew ash in all directions, blanketing the countryside with sand, silt, glass and larger pumice pebbles. This ash will alter the surrounding environment for decades, affecting vegetation, ground cover and water flow.

Geologists also learned from Pinatubo's interior, particularly how new magma, forced up from deep in the Earth's crust, can trigger a reaction in a dormant volcano. Scientists gleaned much about volcanic "plumbing" and the importance of this fresh magma on the overall system.

Still, questions remain. When will it erupt again? How intense might that eruption be? What is the cyclical nature of eruptions in general? Can other volcanoes behave like Pinatubo, and if so, why?

Pinatubo was much different from the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens in Washington, which blew sideways. Its gaseous plume stayed relatively low. Pinatubo went up like a geyser.

"Pinatubo was huge," Trepte says. "It went into both hemispheres, and the debris moved over the globe very quickly. So we learned a lot about circulation patterns in the upper atmosphere. It's like putting a color dye in a sink or bathtub, so you can see how the fluid moves. Pinatubo created a laboratory for us where we could observe all these motions in the atmosphere."

Kurt Loft is a staff writer for The Tampa Tribune.

From [www.geo.mtu.edu/volcanoes/pinatubo/volcano](http://www.geo.mtu.edu/volcanoes/pinatubo/volcano)  
This view from the northeast crater rim of Pinatubo was taken after the eruption in July 1993.

Here's a select look at what atmospheric scientists have learned a decade after the eruption:

◆ **Temporary global cooling.** The massive aerosol cloud temporarily stopped global warming, lowering average global temperatures by about 1 degree Fahrenheit (0.5 degrees Celsius) through 1992.

◆ **A global pall of dust.** Pinatubo pumped so much volcanic ash and gas into the upper reaches of the atmosphere that the normal levels of stratospheric aerosols increased by more than 20 times.

◆ **Ozone level drops.** The protective ozone layer in the upper atmosphere weakened as a result of gases injected into the stratosphere. The ozone eventually recovered.

◆ **Change in weather.** Climate models showed that Pinatubo produced a shift in wind patterns over the North Atlantic Ocean that led to a warmer-than-usual winter in Europe in 1991-92.

◆ **Mud flows.** Millions of tons of ash and rock that blanketed the flanks of Pinatubo created dangerous rivers of mud during the annual rainy season. These dangers have not gone away.

◆ **Swirling atmosphere.** The eruption was a unique natural experiment that revealed atmospheric currents previously unseen by scientists. As satellites tracked volcanic gases moving around the world, they documented movements passing from the lower troposphere into the stratosphere for the first time.