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TRITON TIES

Fallout from Austin financial firm's troubles hitting one group especially hard **Page One**



SCOTT BURNS

AT&T's handling of iPhone an echo of old arrogance

"You see, this consists of a multibillion-dollar matrix of space-age technology that is so sophisticated even we can't handle it. But that's your problem, isn't it?"

"So the next time you complain about your phone service, why don't you try using two Dixie cups with a string? We don't care. We don't have to. We're the phone company."

— Lily Tomlin from "Saturday Night Live" long ago

Once upon a time, in a universe far, far away, there was an empire called American Telephone & Telegraph. If you used a telephone, you were a subject of the empire.

The people hated the tyranny of the empire. They worked and innovated to overthrow it.

First, they sued to be able to buy and use their own phones. They won. Then, they built and used a new technology for long-distance calls. It surged. Finally, they broke the empire into pieces called ROCs, for regional operating companies. A new age of telecommunications blossomed.

But the reduced empire didn't learn from the rebellion. It still thought it could push its remaining subjects around. Around the turn of the millennium, when it introduced wireless Internet access over its telephone network, it claimed that it was the fastest network in big, full-page newspaper ads.

I believed those ads. I bought the service so I could send columns while on my motorcycle trip reporting on the U.S.-Mexico border in 1999.

By the time I reached Yuma, I had found that the service was too slow to be usable and abandoned it. It became necessary to register in hotels that offered Internet access. A few months later, Mobile Computing magazine tested the competing services. Their finding: AT&T was the slowest, not the fastest.

That's why I'm no longer a customer of the old empire.

But the old empire found new energy when it gained exclusive distribution rights to a new kind of phone. Apple's iPhone, introduced in mid-2007, is changing computers and telecommunication. If you have one, you know. If you don't, you wish you did.

More than 22 million people have bought iPhones. Many more would — if availability weren't tied to the old empire.

But it is. Now hardly a day goes by without some blog speculation on when there will be a Verizon version of the iPhone.

Once again, the people are suffering. Surveys consistently rank the old empire as the worst wireless service provider. And the service has declined as the abundant use of the iPhone has risen.

Only weeks ago in New York, the old empire announced that no one could buy an iPhone off its Web site. The old empire

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IN THE WALL STREET JOURNAL SUNDAY

Stormproof

Are you ready for the next market meltdown? There will be one. There always is. Columnist Brett Arends tells you how to stormproof your portfolio to weather whatever the market may throw at you.

Yoder & Sons



M.K. Perker THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Steve tries to balance his work and home lives.

Starting Out

How to shed a few pounds without dropping too many dollars. **WSJ 1-2**

COMING MONDAY

Piping up for Heatwave

Samuel L. Jackson is among the A-list talent stepping up to the mic to record voice work for Austin gaming company Heatwave Interactive, whose iPhone app starring the actor could be a prelude to bigger projects.

In **TechMonday**

AUSTIN ■ GREEN BUILDING



SCOTT SPECHT
Architect

"The off-grid model has the most challenges, so that's the test case we designed for. We think that the value is in the complete self-sufficiency, the absolutely minimal environmental and site impact, and the fact that this would be a model for what can be done — a "first adapter" demonstration of the ultimate in green living."

Although the finished product won't be built of Lego bricks, the ZeroHouse will boast an array of ecofriendly features that will allow it to generate as much energy as its inhabitants use and to take care of its own water needs, say the house's designers, Scott Specht and Louise Harpman.

More than the sum of its parts

With prototype, pair's vision for self-sufficient 'net-zero' dwelling nearing reality

By Shonda Novak
AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

It looks like it could take off. And the two Austin architects developing a prototype for an off-the-grid house designed to save as much energy as it consumes hope their project does just that, figuratively speaking.

Trademarked as the ZeroHouse, Scott Specht and Louise Harpman's compact modular structure shouts "futuristic." From the composting unit beneath it to the solar panels on the roof. It looks as if it could be housing for space pioneers,

but Specht and Harpman have their sights set on planet Earth for its first occupant. The ZeroHouse design is on the cutting edge of the green building movement: so-called net-zero houses that generate as much energy as they use over the course of a year and handle all or most of their own water and wastewater needs. They are built with renewable materials and advanced energy- and water-conservation features.

The net-zero concept is not yet mainstream, but it's growing. Examples include a zero-energy house in Edmonton, Alberta, and the SOL development in East Austin, where developers ultimately will build 40 homes with features such as solar panels and energy-efficient designs.

Specht and Harpman's design takes the concept to its limits, including the fact that it is prefabricated and sits on four stainless-steel anchors that allow the house to be installed without excavating the site, reducing its environmental impact even more.

It is designed to operate with no connections to external sources of power or water. "The off-grid model has the most challenges,

so that's the test case we designed for," Specht said. "We think that the value is in the complete self-sufficiency, the absolutely minimal environmental and site impact, and the fact that this would be a model for what can be done — a "first adapter" demonstration of the ultimate in green living."

Specht and Harpman — who are divorced but share an architectural practice — said they

See **HOUSE, D2**

The ZeroHouse: What it does

- Generates its own electricity: High-efficiency solar panels produce power and store it in a battery bank. When the batteries are fully charged, the house can operate without sunlight for one week.

- The solar array is sized to support all the energy needs of the house, including electronics. In some months, it may produce excess power that could be resold back to a utility, under a hybrid version that can be tied to a power grid.

- Conserves energy: Closed-cell structural foam insulates the walls, floors and roof to R58. There are zoned climate-control systems and LED lighting.

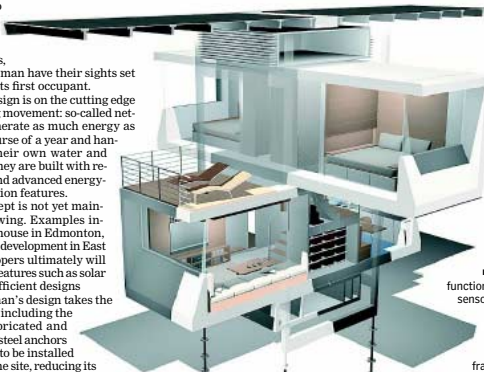
- Collects its own water: Rainwater is diverted into four 550-gallon cisterns. Low-pressure plumbing fixtures are gravity-fed, reducing the need for power-consuming pumps.

- Processes its own waste through a "digester" unit beneath the house. The unit converts the waste into clean, dry compost that needs to be removed just twice a year.

- Is completely automatic. All functions of the house are monitored by sensors and can be controlled through a laptop computer.

- Is largely maintenance-free: The exterior panels won't scratch, dent, mildew or fade, and the steel frame components are bonded to resist corrosion. It also comes in a variety of colors — even burnt orange, its architects say.

Source: Specht Harpman LLC



SPECHT HARPMAN

The ZeroHouse is shaded by two solar panels and shot through with electronic sensors that can be controlled through a laptop.

PERSONAL FINANCE

Do your homework before filing for college aid

Federal form has gotten shorter, but FAFSA still central as ever to securing school loans, grants

By Dave Carpenter
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Filling out the form for federal college aid used to be regarded as the equivalent of a root canal.

Thanks to some steps toward simplification, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid is a bit less grueling for online applicants this year — perhaps just a routine cavity filling. Worthy of dread or not, the FAFSA remains an essential step toward getting help paying for

college. It is commonly used by colleges and states to set grant and loan amounts, and those seeking aid for the fall semester should submit it as early in the year as possible.

What has changed about the FAFSA this year? The U.S. Department of Education is still in the early stages of its effort to make the FAFSA less complex. It has shortened the online application for aid in the 2010-11 school year by as many as 22 questions, using improved "skip logic" to allow students or, more likely, their parents to bypass those that don't apply to them.

The most time-consuming questions remain, however. Experienced FAFSA filers say that perhaps the most noticeable change is the technology

that has made the site more user-friendly. It has a shorter worksheet, improved navigation, a handy "help and hints" section and useful information about your chosen colleges, such as an instant estimate of eligibility for loans.

How long does it take to complete?

The FAFSA Web site (www.fafsa.ed.gov) estimates that first-time users should be able to finish in less than an hour. That may be a best-case scenario. It assumes you have gathered the key information in advance: end-of-year pay stubs if you haven't done your tax returns yet, Social Security numbers of student and parents, driver's license number, investment records, recent bank statements.

See **AID, D2**