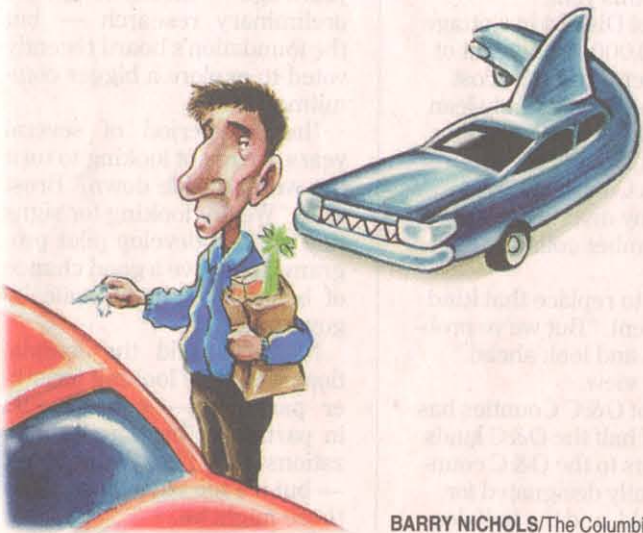


Out of the mouths of mouse potatoes, verbal invention



BARRY NICHOLS/The Columbian

If you spend too much time as a mouse potato, or if you'd rather shark for 10 minutes than walk 50 feet, you're going to start muffin-topping.

And don't take our word for it because, well, they're not our words. Take it from John Morse, the guy who actually brought us those turns of phrase.

Morse, president of the dictionary publisher Merriam-Webster, was at Clark College recently to discuss our ever-changing language.

Morse said that "mouse potato" is one of his new favorite creations. A twist on "couch

potato," it refers to someone who spends too much time at a computer. Morse also shared several words, usages and expressions that have been submitted to an online interactive compilation, Merriam-Webster's Open Dictionary. They include:

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NOT QUITE the NEWS

■ Muffin top (noun): That area above the belt line that over-

hangs low-cut pants worn by people with excessive belly fat.

■ Prepone (verb): To reschedule something to an earlier time; the opposite of postpone.

■ Scrum (verb): To eat the last few crumbs in a container by way of tilting the bag into

one's mouth.

And finally, a usage that might resonate at Clark College during high-traffic periods on campus:

■ Shark (verb): To circle around a full parking lot in one's car while stalking a guy who is walking to his parking space in hopes of claiming his spot after he leaves.

To preserve and protest?

A dictionary isn't just a handy collection point for new words, by the way. It also helps you match spellings and definitions. That's a function you don't get from computerized spell-check-

ing systems, which might be the reason something went slightly wrong in this recent rewrite of a section of the Vancouver municipal code.

It explains its purpose this way: "Promote a range of housing choices while preserving neighborhood livability and protesting the consumer's choices in housing."

And we get some protesting, by the way, when we try to feed our spell-checker a "scrumb."

OFF BEAT lets members of The Columbian news team step back from our newspaper beats to write the story behind the story, fill in the story, or just tell a story.