

Wishing Fountains Soon to Accept Personal Checks



By B.S. Pile

Boston, MA – The North End of Boston, with its rich Italian influence, has been long known as one of the premier spots for wishing fountains. Wishing fountains, for the benefit of our people-living-under-a-rock readership, are fountains to which, by tradition, you make a wish (without telling anyone) and throw in a coin.

Mr. Enrico Tagliattini, a sixty-something local union rep for the Wishing Fountain and Well Coin Collectors of America (WFWCCA), expressed in a recent interview his anger at the plummeting buying power of small change.

"When my great-grandfather co-founded the WFWCCA over a hundred years ago, a red cent was worth something. A nickel could buy you the Sunday newspaper or a shave at the corner barbershop. Today, the coins I collect from an entire fountain aren't even enough to pay the dry cleaners. It's just not the way it used to be." Mr. Tagliattini, with a little sparkle in his eye, bemused how all this might soon change.


"The Silicon Valley chapter of the WFWCCA has put together a wonderful plan for wiring up all the wishing fountains and wishing wells in a nation-wide secure network, which will allow patrons to use credit cards and deposit personal checks in ATM-like machines. Assuming we will get the federal support for installing the required infrastructure, this system could be up and running within 5 years."

With a little more speculative excitement and technical savvy than you would expect from a soon-to-retire, blue collar worker, Mr. Tagliattini ruffled through a dog-eared prospectus that was apparently given out in the WFWCCA annual meeting in Philadelphia last week. "You see," said Mr. Tagliattini, pointing a shaky finger at a technical diagram, "The payment stations will be water powered and interconnected via a 256-bit key encrypted TCP/IP socket layer to a satellite born backbone. They will be able to handle anything from 1-cent micro-payments up to million dollar money orders, for all those really heavy-duty wishes. And the most exciting part is that it is globally scalable. Do you know how many wells they have in Africa? Millions, and that's not even counting the alligator-infested water holes. Needless to say, the potential is nothing short of mind boggling."



Elephants cautiously keep their distance from the water hole's resident alligator, evidently infesting the area from somewhere outside the frame. "Hey, isn't that \$1.25?," remarked the elephant on the left. "Oh you mean the T-token", said the alligator. "Dibs!"

But not everyone in the world of wishing fountain and bottom-of-the-well coin collecting is happy about this new development. Picketing outside of the North End regional headquarters of the WFWCCA are a small yet vocal group of anti-globalization protesters. The organizer, Mbutu Mbamba, agreed to an interview only after completing his 100th shout-at-a-passer-by quota. "I've slaved all my life for the WFWCCA chapter of Zaire. Now, not only did they change the name of my country to something as silly as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, they've also downsized me. It was *my* job to collect the coins at the bottom of alligator-infested water holes. It wasn't glamorous, but it was a living. Now with plans to install these automated cyber gizmos, I was told that my services would no longer be required. So with nothing to lose, I cashed out all my savings and came here, to a foreign land where nose hairs freeze, to tell the planet once and for all that we will no longer stand for such cruel first-world exploitation."

And so the modernization debate rages on. Only a fool or an economist would attempt to speculate at its outcome. Personally, as I inspect this lovely fountain in historic downtown Boston, philanthropically parting with the change from my last purchase, I am saddened by the thought that such places will never again be the serene and peaceful wish-making venues they once were. Wait a second, is that someone's Citibank/American Airlines frequent flyer mileage card? How about that. I've been wishing for one of those for weeks. 



A typical fountain harboring 63 pennies, 10 nickels, and some clearly counterfeit Canadian pesos.