

Update From Mayor on New Bedford Schools

Earlier this week I invited New Bedford School Superintendent Dr. Mary Lou Francis to begin a conversation about her role in the New Bedford Public School Department.



Dr. Francis has since expressed an interest in engaging in that conversation, and I am hopeful that a constructive dialogue will follow.

I want to take this opportunity to recognize the Superintendent's personal commitment and work ethic. Dr. Francis assumed her current position under difficult circumstances, and, without question, has worked tirelessly. I believe she cares very deeply about our schools.

New Bedford schools are at a critical point in their history. Given the precariousness of the Department's position relative to state overseers, citizens of New Bedford should know that I will not proceed down any path which might jeopardize the ability of New Bedford to satisfy state deadlines and other requirements, and avoid a state takeover.

That is why I contacted state officials earlier today and asked them to extend all deadlines associated with the approval of the district turnaround plan to accommodate a continued dialogue with the Superintendent.

I am awaiting their official response, but am hopeful that the

state will accommodate our need in this circumstance. Students, parents, teachers, and Dr. Francis herself, are owed a respectful and positive resolution in this matter.

The Hunger Games Movie Review



By Shonna
McGrail

When a movie takes in \$155 million dollars in its opening weekend, it's hard not to wonder what all the hype is about. "The Hunger Games" has set a record for most revenue for a non-franchise movie in an opening weekend, and third best debut of all times, only falling behind the "Harry Potter" finale and "The Dark Knight." If you weren't amongst the masses piling into the theatres this weekend, there's a good chance you're considering checking it out. Before you go, here is some food for thought.

It's hard to believe that you haven't seen the trailers at this point, but here's a little background on the film. The movie portrays a 16-year old girl named Katniss Everdeen who lives in a post-apocalyptic world where money and power are controlled by the Capitol. As a reminder to the rest of the districts of the Capitol's absolute power, they select a boy and a girl between the ages of 12 and 18 from each district and force them to compete in the Hunger Games; a fight to the death which is televised for all to watch. When Katniss' 12-year old sister's name is drawn, Katniss takes her position

and thus must face the brutal challenge of staying alive.



I should start by saying that I recently became an avid fan of the book series. As someone who loves the science fiction genre, a friend suggested I check out the novels. After buying the first one on my Nook, I rapidly bought the second and third, sacrificing sleeping and eating in a compulsive race to reach the end. To say the books are a page turner is a great understatement. That being said, the books were still very fresh in my mind for the premiere of the film. If you are a fan of the book, you will see that many changes were made, some for the better, some for the worse (in my opinion). One thing to attempt to keep in mind though, is that the book was written in first person. Trying to transfer such personal thoughts and emotions to the audience is a daunting task when you really consider it.

I did find myself a bit put off by the way the producers clearly tried to play up the love triangle aspect of the story. While there is a love triangle of sorts in the books, romance is not a prominent aspect of "The Hunger Games" the way it is in say... "Twilight." In the novels, it's clear that the strong willed and fiercely independent Katniss Everdeen does her best to avoid the trap of love, and romance is almost warped into a part of the power struggle. Nevertheless, can one expect anything less from Hollywood?

Moving on from this gripe, I should mention that this movie is not a chick flick. Despite having a strong female role, the themes of power and survival have been found as appealing to many generations and genders. Sources are reporting that only 61 percent of moviegoers were female this weekend. So if you're a guy worried that you'll be stuck for 2 hours and 22

minutes in a Twilight-esque gushing teen romance, fear not. There is plenty of action and adventure for all. Furthermore, the themes of "The Hunger Games" can really leave you thinking after you exit the theatre (if you predisposed to ponder such things).

The special effects in the movie were pretty cool, and while they toned down the gore factor a bit there is no escaping the essentially violent and harsh nature of the movie. This is one thing about a book being adapted into a movie that always excites me; while you know the movie will stray from the



version you created in your own mind, it also allows you a chance to see it all come to life. The visual aspect of the film really kept me on the edge of my seat, and despite knowing the outcome, I felt myself experiencing quite an adrenaline rush throughout much of the movie. One complaint to the filmmakers though; would a few more steady shots kill you? The camera is shaky throughout the film, perhaps to recreate that "realistic" feel when you read the book through Katniss' eyes, but it took me 10 nauseous minutes to really adjust to it.

Despite a few complaints I have about the reinterpretation of the plot and of the seasick filming technique, I have to admit I will probably try to see this movie again while it's in theatres. Partly it's because it was a great big screen experience, but partly because I really enjoyed the casting job. I found Jennifer Lawrence to be a great Katniss Everdeen. She maintained the persona of strong and quiet, but with an uncontrollable streak of rebellion. She got this down without overacting it, and the few moments of emotion she had felt raw and believable. In my opinion, Josh Hutcherson plays

Peeta Mellark well. Peeta was never written to be a casanova, but rather more of a philosopher with careful logic and a calm demeanor, and that is how Hutcherson portrayed him. Liam Hemsworth is also cast in the movie as Gale Hawthorne, Katniss' opinionated best friend with his own fierce survival instinct. A solid support cast includes Woody Harrelson as her drunken mentor, Elizabeth Banks with some brief comic, and Donald Sutherland makes a rather chilling President Snow.

Reading the book is by no means needed to follow the movie plot, but it definitely gives you some critical insights that the movie didn't quite manage. Thus, I would suggest reading the book first if you have the time and interest because it is a great read. While I'm not going to go as far as to say the movie lives up to the outrageous hype, it is certainly entertaining. It's already got me hooked into seeing it again, something I rarely to never do. Need I say more?

UFC 145 Preview and Results: Jones vs. Evans

Ultimate Fighting Championship 145 takes place Saturday April 21st, at the Philips Arena in Atlanta, Georgia.

City to Offer Tax Credit

Assistance

Mayor Jon Mitchell and the Community Economic Development Center of Southeastern Massachusetts (CEDC) are encouraging residents of New Bedford to learn whether they qualify for valuable tax credits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the MA Senior Circuit Breaker.



Interested residents must contact the CEDC to make an appointment to learn whether they qualify to claim these benefits on their tax returns. The CEDC will provide assistance to qualifying individuals at New Bedford City Hall on Thursday, April 5th from 11:00 a.m.–4:00p.m., residents interested in making an appointment to meet CEDC at City Hall should contact the organization at (508) 979-4684.

The Internal Revenue Service defines the Earned Income Tax Credit as, “a refundable federal income tax credit available to eligible families low-income working individuals and families.” And, while the EITC is the federal government’s largest program benefiting working families, it is largely underutilized.

“The EITC is a proven means of providing tax relief that spurs economic activity and labor force participation while targeting those most in need. I encourage the people of New Bedford to learn whether they qualify for this benefit, and to use the tax preparation services offered by the Community Economic Development Center,” said Mayor Mitchell.

Community Economic Development Center Director, Corinn Williams said each year, her organization staffs a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program site where residents who are

unable to prepare their own taxes and cannot afford professional help are assisted. "There are still many working families and seniors in our community who may qualify to get money back, but are not aware they need to file to receive their refund. In addition, the recent announcement regarding the economic stimulus bill also requires that individuals to file their taxes to collect the rebate. Dollars reclaimed through the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Senior Circuit Breaker give a boost not only to these families but it helps our local economy as well," said Ms. Williams.

The federal government states that the new maximum credit is \$5,751 for a family with two or more children; \$3,094 for a family with one child and \$464 if there are no children. The government also states that the new income limits are:

- \$40,964 (\$40,044 if married filing jointly) for families with two or more children
- \$36,052 (\$41,132 if married filing jointly) for families with one child
- \$13,660 (\$18,740 if married filing jointly) if there are no children

Investment income must be \$3,150 or less and children must meet certain age, relationship and residency requirements.

Website Launched to Help Home Buyers, Owners

The City of New Bedford Office of Housing and Community Development and the Fall River and New Bedford Housing Partnership, launched a new website designed to provide both prospective homebuyers and homeowners with a full range of information.



At www.frnrbhp.com, homebuyers can access information including upcoming homebuyer education classes, down payment assistance programs and mortgage programs. The information is provided to empower homebuyers to make the best decisions regarding purchasing a new home and to share tools that can help them to save money. Existing homeowners can find out information on low interest loans and grants to help make needed repairs to their homes. Visitors to the website may also access information about affordable properties for sale in New Bedford and Fall River through a lottery program.

The “News & Events” section of the site will be updated regularly with housing related events and classes in the New Bedford and Fall River area. The website contains links to all of the participating agencies including local lenders and social service agencies that can assist with credit counseling, tenant counseling, legal assistance and foreclosure prevention counseling.

The Fall River and New Bedford Housing Partnership participating agencies include: BankFive; BayCoast Bank, Bristol County Savings Bank; Bristol Elder Services; Catholic

Social Services; Fall River Community Development Agency; Fall River Municipal Credit Union; Fannie Mae; First Citizens' Federal Credit Union; MassHousing; Mechanics Cooperative Bank; Money Management International; Neighborhood Housing Services of the South Shore; City of New Bedford Office of Housing & Community Development; South Coastal Counties Legal Services; South Shore Housing; and St. Anne's Credit Union.

The Fall River and New Bedford Housing Partnership, founded in 2007, was formed to address the housing and foreclosure crisis. The Partnership provides assistance to individuals and families facing a risk of foreclosure by providing foreclosure prevention counseling, as well as educating consumers about financial literacy, credit worthiness and innovative loan products, including purchase and rehabilitation programs.

For additional information, please visit the new website at www.frnbp.com or contact the City of New Bedford Office of Housing and Community Development at 508-979-1500.

Mustache March—A Storied Tradition



by Nicholas
Walecka

Every spring (with a few exceptions), I travel from Massachusetts to Colorado to visit friends and to hit the slopes in the magnificent Rocky Mountains. About five years ago on a trip to Breckenridge, I noticed a trend that I really hadn't seen much of since the 80's when my father was in his heyday—the moustache. (He had a sweet 'stache until the mid-nineties or so.) Men everywhere (and some unfortunate women) were sporting mustaches, and it didn't seem like such a big deal to them, but it was to me. I had to find out the reason for this newfound facial treason.

After talking with some of the locals, I found out that this wasn't just a random occurrence or a strange series of coincidences, but rather a yearly tradition. Every March, men (mostly in their 20's and 30's) grew their upper lip hair into carefully cultivated mustaches, merely for personal enjoyment. They called it "Mustache March." Some sported the pencil thin look, some used a moderately groomed mustache, while others a more traditional, fuller look. Some were more daring and attempted the Handlebar (see Rollie Fingers), the Fu Manchu (see Hulk Hogan) and even the Horseshoe (often confused with the Handlebar). And it wasn't just in Colorado. I heard it was big in parts of California. Other ski areas around the country were reporting stashes of 'staches amongst the population. To my surprise, it was even big within The United States Air Force.

POPULAR MUSTACHES



I was taken with what I had witnessed, and suddenly I knew what my face was missing all those years. I was never a beard guy (too itchy), and sideburns weren't my thing, but a moustache? I could handle that! Plus my dad had one for all those years, so neither he nor the real boss, my mother, could do anything about it (though they tried).

So it was on that ski trip that I began growing out the hair above my lips that would eventually become the very first mustache of my life. By April, I had one, and a solid one at that, and the pictures are on Facebook to prove it.

That infamous spring came and went, and for one reason or another, I decided to shave the thing off, but the damage had already been done. It was then that I realized that to have a proper mustache was to really know what it felt like to be a man. Besides, it made my nose hair seem less out of place, and it was a nice, furry little change of pace. Plus, it was never intended to be a permanent thing, so at the very least, it was a fun experience.

Seasons changed, and once again I found myself counting down the days until the next February where I could start to cultivate my mustache for March. And so the tradition goes...I now grow a mustache every March, and a few years ago, I noticed that the trend had made its way back east. I saw that a lot of young men in New England were partaking, and that every recurring March brought some of my friends to become lip-deep in facial hair. Though I can't take complete credit (some of the Colorado transplants probably brought it back

with them as well), I would like to say that I had some influence on a few of them at least. (I can already hear them vehemently denying this as I write.)

While it did catch on within my inner circle and amongst some others who had caught wind of the tradition some other way, most people didn't and still don't understand it. "You have a mustache!" scream female friends when they see me out around town. Older ladies in my office smile at me when I walk by.

Guys say things like, "nice 'stache" when they see me, but I know they're laughing at me on the inside, along with most of the ladies. There even seems to be an anti-mustache campaign going on, as I often read about people bashing "hipsters" for having "ironic" mustaches. But for every five haters, there is at least one person who becomes completely infatuated with its existence. I've literally had woman beg me to bring it back. "Where's the mustache?" they say. "I want it back."

They demand me to grow it again. Same with some men, especially some of the guys at work. Most of them can't stop talking about it. Love it or hate it, I understand. Generally, it's not something you see much of anymore, but I feel that you have to have had one to really understand how it feels, inside and out.

From beginning to end, the human responses alone make the process of growing one worthwhile. A mustache in its early stages isn't ever a very good look, which is why I got my girlfriend a \$90 Edible Arrangement on Valentine's Day so I could start growing in February without complaints. And depending on whom you speak with (again, my girlfriend), some might say it's never a very handsome thing to try, but overall, I consider all my experiments with the mustache to have been successful because of the way it makes ME feel.

I've come to find that a mustache can make a man of average handsomeness turn into the top stud on his block, because a man who rocks a mustache is a confident man, and confidence is one of the keys to success in life, whether on the street, in

the business world, in the bedroom, or in our everyday lives.



Legend has it Robin Olds started Mustache March.

The tradition of Mustache March is believed to have been started by Air Force Brigadier General Robin Olds, a decorated Veteran of Vietnam and World War II. As the legend goes, the Air Force has always had a strict policy against facial hair, but Olds decided to push the boundaries. He was a triple-ace, meaning that he had at least fifteen head-to-head air victories against other planes in battle. (He had sixteen wins, to be exact.) Anyways, Olds decided that he would grow a mustache in defiance of the anti-facial hair policy, basically because he was such a badass that he knew he could get away with it.

Eventually, Olds was forced to shave his mustache when he moved up in the Air Force after retiring from his famously successful fighter pilot position. Apparently, he never got higher than Brigadier General because of his general

brashness, insubordination, and drinking habits, though he was viewed as the top winged commander of the Vietnam War. Nonetheless, he had made his mark in the air and also the upper lip of the men of the Air Force. Many of his comrades had begun to imitate him, and a tradition was started that lasts to this day. Olds paved the way for "Mustache March," the yearly tradition within the Air Force where men grow mustaches in friendly protest of the rules.

Nowadays, it seems that the Air Force's tradition has spread into civilian culture. Mustache March has taken off, and though it is not insanely popular, it is showing up all over the place.

There are commercials on national television for the chain Buffalo Wild Wings that campaign for "more March," where the main character is a man in his twenty's with a mustache that seems way out of place on him. There are parties all over the country aimed strictly at celebrating the sacred 'stache. The website www.mustachemarch.com is devoted to raising money for charity in the name of the mustache (their slogan is "just grow it," and the movement has even inspired a the copycat "Movember," where men grow their beards for charity).

Yahoo.com even recently reported that The American Mustache Institute (AMI) is planning a "Million Mustache March" on the nation's capital, part of an ongoing campaign to convince lawmakers to create government incentives to grow facial hair.

Who knew there was such a thing as the American Mustache Institute, never mind people who want to be reimbursed for growing one? And at what cost!

It seems that the mustache has made its resurgence. I'd like to think so, at least. Never did I think that I'd write a four-plus page story on mustaches, but now that I did, I'm happy with myself. I'm happy that I learned about the origins of Mustache March, and who Robin Olds was because I googled those keywords. I'm happy that I learned that this isn't just going on in Colorado or amongst my friends, but

rather that it's a nationwide event of sorts. And I'm happy that I took a shot on writing about something that no one probably really cares about, except me and the AMI's hopeful million or so that plan on "marching" to D.C. And even though that's highly unlikely, and even though the people like to snicker and smile, I've had a great time the last five or so Marches, and I plan on bringing it back again next year, barring any growing issues. Hopefully I can be an inspiration to a whole new generation of growers and showers, as well as to be a leader in the fight against the anti-mustache movements that seem to be taking place.

"To each his own mustache." – Myself

Thousands of Fishermen, Mayor Mitchell To March on Capitol Hill

On Wednesday, March 21, 2012, New Bedford Mayor Jon Mitchell will join New Bedford commercial fishermen in Washington D.C., for a march and rally on Capitol Hill. Organizers anticipate thousands of fishermen hailing from ports across America will participate in the rally. The event will draw attention to the damaging effect federal fisheries regulations are having on America's commercial fishing industry.



Mayor Mitchell said rally attendees will urge Congress to address the lack of flexibility in the Magnuson-Stevens Act

and pointed to the 10-year rebuilding requirement as an example of the Act's inflexibility.

"Decisions need to be based on timely, accurate information. Today, the federal government is relying on data from 2007 and the lack of fresh, reliable science is unacceptable," the Mayor said.

"An important step in the right direction is for Congress is to pass the Kerry-Snowe Fisheries Investment and Regulatory Relief Act which will invest in fishing science that we can have confidence in," he continued.

The Port of New Bedford is America's #1 fishing port with landings valued at \$306 million. New Bedford is New England's seafood hub, with more than 30 processors and distributors, ranging in size from high-volume international wholesale to local retail operations.

Boutique Fitness, Personal Training in Downtown New Bedford



By Shonna
McGrail

I never thought of myself as the sort who would enjoy having a personal trainer. As a college athlete who has worked as a

swim instructor and a coach, I like to think I know a thing or two about fitness. I read the health magazines, take supplements, and get to the gym three days a week on average. In my mind, personal trainers were just for people who didn't understand how to use gym equipment or lacked personal motivation. Either that, or for people who were working up to a body building competition, another category I would never place myself in. I realized my preconceptions about personal trainers were mistaken after just a few sessions at Boutique Fitness.

Boutique Fitness is one of Downtown New Bedford's newest additions, and it's only comprehensive fitness studio. Having just opened in late January, I was intrigued when I had the opportunity to try out a few sessions. Given that my workouts tend to be light on the running and heavy on the weight lifting, I expected to be criticized for my cardio habits, and then to set about curling free weights like any other day of the week. However, from the moment I walked into Boutique Fitness, I was both intrigued and confused. Where was the treadmill, and the stacks of weights, where were all the Nautilus machines? Instead I saw things like a hallway covered in artificial turf, and what looked like a bungy cord dangling from the ceiling (I later found out this was a TRX suspension system).

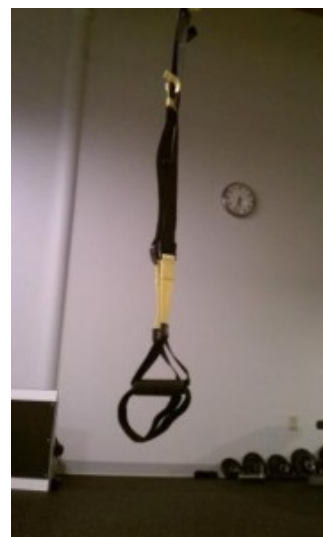


I was told that my first session would be a consultation and fitness assessment. Boutique Fitness is co-owned by Lara Harrington and Angela Corrieri-Johnson, both whom are certified personal trainers with years of experience. My first session was with Lara, and after filling

out some basic paperwork I was given a thorough fitness exam that went beyond the typical blood pressure and heart rate,

and was able to deliver specific information about my target calorie intake and my body fat percentage. It was quickly evident that Boutique Fitness treats “working out” as a science, and Lara had rapid answers for every question that popped into my head about fitness and even nutrition.

When I returned to Boutique Fitness, a customized routine had been created for me. I started with lunges up and down the “fake grass” hallway, which over time I discovered has many unique uses. Much of my routine focused on those aspects which I had voiced as being my main concerns, especially my back. I am the sort to carry all my stress in my shoulders, which makes me hunch up and look perpetually cold. My customized routine had many components which really focused on isolating that problem, and after a workout I could instantly feel the effects. I had never considered how much working with a personal trainer can really help you with the finer points of fitness, such as form. Having someone not just encourage you, but gently correct you makes the workout far more efficient.



TRX at Boutique Fitness

One of the things that I was really enamored by at Boutique Fitness was that many of the exercises could be done at home without fancy equipment. Additionally, their website

(<http://www.boutiquefitnessnb.com/>) shares a variety of helpful tips for fitness and well-being, such as a daily blog with photos, videos, recipes, and food journaling. For those with a busy schedule, the ability to get the occasional work out done at home is an excellent perk. Additionally, they were very flexible with my “quirky” work schedule, and their downtown location is very accessible to most locals. The workout sessions I did there were 30 minutes to an hour, which I thought was ideal for fitting into a busy schedule. Even more exciting to me was that they offer daily 20 minute “bullet” sessions between 11 am and 1 pm, which means that for those who work downtown, it is perfectly feasible to fit your workout in during lunch. If you’re worried about showing up at work sweaty, don’t fret because they have a shower on site that comes well stocked with every supply imaginable to get you back in a work-place appropriate condition.

Boutique Fitness is truly a positive experience, one that has changed my view on many aspects of fitness, and inspired me to keep going to Lara and Angela for training. The Boutique Fitness studio is located at 516 Pleasant Street in New Bedford. For more information, I suggest going to their website and liking their Facebook. They offer a complimentary consultation and fitness assessment, and the two women are so friendly I can promise you won’t regret it. Boutique Fitness is based on inspiration, not intimidation, so no matter your goals you will feel comfortable.

The Maya Calendar, 2012 and

Pop Culture



by Joe
Silvia

The Maya calendar comes to an end on December 21, 2012 and according to the ancient Maya the world is supposed to come to a cataclysmic end, right?

Wrong.

There isn't a single document, script, writ, sculpture or mention by a single ancient Maya that states this. This is a cold, hard, fact. It's not up for debate. If anyone says otherwise, they simply need to refer to the document by name. No one has done it and no one will, because it simply doesn't exist. It's a modern invention driven by a market that profits from fear-mongering and sensationalism. It sells books and magazines, makes millions at the box office, and gets people to read news articles.

So what is going on? Where did all this end of the world talk come from? Who started it? Doesn't the Maya calendar come to an end on December 21, 2012 like we all heard? How can millions of people be wrong? Everyone is discussing it. What exactly did the Maya say about this particular date? Who were the Maya anyway? Read on.

The Maya; Pre-Colombian Mesoamerican Giants

The Maya are a pre-Colombian, Mesoamerican people originating from what is today southern Mexico, and parts of Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. It's not exactly known when the Maya made their first appearance. According to the *Popol*

Vuh, which is their written account of creation, three “worlds” or cycles have already passed and we are in the fourth which began on August 11, 3114 BCE. Each cycle lasts 5,125 years. By their account, that would place their origin some 20,000 years ago. Modern scholars have a more conservative opinion and place their origins at approximately 2,000 BCE, possibly a bit earlier.



The Maya as a major civilization lasted until their conquest with the arrival of the Spanish in the 16th century, where their numbers dwindled but did not disappear. There are still ancestors of the Maya living today, and as a matter of fact, there is a rather large population of Maya from Guatemala in New Bedford.

While there were Paleo-Indians, various peoples and minor settlements in the region as far back as 10,000 BCE, the Maya were one of the first major civilizations, if not the first. Meso-American history is characterized by cultural diffusion and many of the firsts in the Americas. It's difficult to concretely pinpoint which civilizations were responsible for some of these firsts such as writing and urban planning, but it is generally agreed that they can be attributed to the Olmec, Maya, and Zapotec. The Olmec are important to the story of the Maya because they likely inherited from them the basic calendar that the modern world is currently discussing in books, the news media, and internet. Who came first and who is responsible for the firsts, is not a topic that falls within the scope of this article.

While the early dates mentioned above only approximate when these cultures made their appearance, they don't reflect the dates when they became true major civilizations with city-

states, astronomy, engineering, urban planning, writing, commerce, architecture, etc. These came much later. For the Maya in particular the period that reflects these major developments coincides with their Classic period that begins circa 250 ACE, although their writing began a few centuries earlier around 250 BCE.

Maya Writing and Documents

While the Maya script or writing system may or may not be the first example of writing in the Americas, it is the only example of a system that represents the spoken language of the community. Along with being the most complete, developed and complex writing system of Pre-Colombian America, it is the one system that has been deciphered the most with at least 10,000 texts on stelae, monuments, pottery, stucco, tombs and even paper made from bark called *huun*-paper. This has lead to a greater understanding of their culture in comparison to their contemporaries. The system of writing was in use to at least the arrival of the conquistadors, when it began to wither until it's re-discovery and decipherment by scholars in the 19th and 20th century. It is currently undergoing a sort of revival in some parts of Mexico with Maya peoples and support from the government.

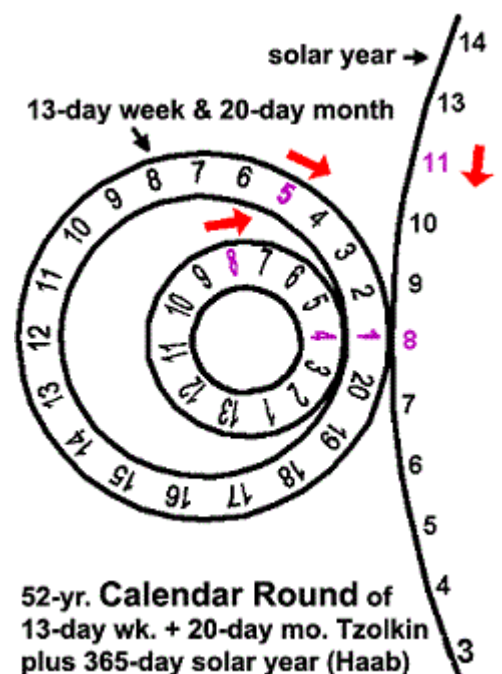
In appearance, the script resembles small images or pictures, similar in fashion to Egyptian hieroglyphs, but unrelated and certainly different. The writing is made up of logo-grams complimented with syllabic glyphs. In the simplest of possible terms, this means that each glyph can be either a syllable, a word or even a few different words. It's a similar structure to that of the Japanese language with it's Kanji characters complemented with the Hiragana and Katakana syllabary. A number of languages utilized this script, just as German, Spanish, English, and many other cultures currently use the Latin or Roman alphabet.

Maya Calendar; Origins

As mentioned before, pre-Colombian Mesoamerica is

characterized by cultural diffusion. The Maya calendar is based on a system that many Pre-Colombian cultures were using by the 5th century BCE. The Maya took the existing calendar and refined and improved upon it. The sheer amount of script that has been found and deciphered greatly contributed to the understanding of the Maya calendar in particular in comparison to others. The Maya calendar is incredibly complex and a full volume would be needed just to touch upon basic elements of it. For the purposes of this article we will discuss only the pertinent elements and for the sake of practicality will simplify our discussion, even at the risk of upsetting Mayanist scholars.

By the time the Maya were using the extant version of the calendar, it was made up of two basic cycles, a 260-day count called a *tzolk'in* and the more familiar 365-day count called a *haab*. The *tzolk'in*, which is still in use by the Maya today was not an astronomically based calendar, but a ritual calendar and is the most important and oldest. It was used to determine when to harvest maize, set auspicious days to have marriages, build homes, determine names, initiation ceremonies and other rituals.



The *haab* was the same length as our solar-based year but divided differently. Since a "true" tropical or solar year is 365.25 days long this .25 day presents a problem for any

civilization that utilizes a calendar and wants to maintain synchronicity. Our current calendar is made up of twelve 28, 30 or 31 day periods that total 365 days, so in essence we ignore that .25 of a day each year. After 4 years we have "lost" a day, so we solve this problem by adding that day back in every fourth year, called a leap year.

The Maya approached this problem by, well..."ignoring" it in a way. The 360 day period called a *tun* was capped with a 5 day period called *wayeb'* to total 365 days. Essentially "losing" a full day every four years just as happens in our modern calendar. However, there was a genius and a larger purpose behind this. It meant every season, year or event started on a different day giving an altogether new auspicious meaning to each passing event and year as a whole. Somewhat similar in meaning to how the Chinese will have a year of the Dragon, Dog or Snake. Because these events "wandered" through the calendar, this is called a wandering year.

The *tun* or basic year had 18 "months" called a *winal* that were 20 days long. There were smaller divisions, such as 13 and 20 days, and many larger counts, such as the *Ka'tun* which was twenty 360 day periods, and the Calendar Round which is approximately 52 years long. Next is the *Baktun*, which is integral to this article, and is approximately 394 years long, the *Pictun* which is 7,885 years long, and the *Kalabtun* which is 157,808 years long. There's even more. We then have the *K'inchiltun* which is 3,156,164 years long and finally the *Alautun* which is over 63 Million years long!

Cycles within Cycles

What should be immediately apparent is that an *Alautun* is made up of many *K'inchiltun*, and many more *Kalabtun*, and so on. There are cycles within cycles. If the Maya calendar's third world began in 3114 BCE and ended according to the Doomsday theory in December 2012, we have a period of slightly more than 5,000 years. Not even one *Pictun*! It is a period of 13 *Baktuns*, and that alone demonstrates that after each *Baktun*

concludes, *not ends*, a new one begins. Since the calendar has counts in the tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands and millions of years, it's obvious that the Maya calendar is far longer than 5,000 years long. This standing on its own is a death knell to the doomsday theory.

Just like we use years, decades, centuries, and millennia the Maya used their own system of cycles. To imply that a calendar ends after the completion of a decade, century or millennium would garner a laugh and is absurd on the face of it. They simply conclude and begin anew. The exact same can be said about the Maya calendar. To imply that the world would come to an end because a calendrical event like a *Baktun* concludes and is starting over is just as absurd. The Maya calendar keeps on counting and December 21st, 2012 is simply the beginning of the 13th Baktun. Altogether this 13 *Baktun* period has been dubbed 'The Long Count.'

Maya References to the 'Long Count'; The Tortuguero Monument

Is the conclusion of a Baktun in general or the 'Long Count' of 13 Baktuns specifically of special significance to the Maya? What do they say about this specific date? Do they mention any dates after this one?

In 1915 in Tabasco, Mexico an archaeological site called Tortuguero was discovered and unearthed. This Mayan site had a number of inscribed monuments on it dating to the 7th century. It is one of these monuments, Tortuguero Monument 6 that mentions the 13th *baktun*. This is the sole mention of the 13th *baktun* in the entire archaeological record. Yes, all the modern day madness culminates from this one sole inscription. Here it is in all it's glory:



*The 13th baktun will be finished.
On 4 Ajaw the third of Uniiw ? will occur.
It is the display of B'olon-Yokte'
in a great investiture*

What we can garner from this short passage is that when the 13th *baktun* comes to an end, something will occur that is related to *Bolon Yokte* in a great investiture. *Bolon Yokte* [Kuh] is a deity that is closely associated with conflict, war, and the Underworld. He is often mentioned in creation myths of the Maya. He is a very powerful deity and important events are attached to his presence. An investiture is a formal ceremony where a title and authority is conferred.

For starters, the passage is woefully incomplete. While this has left room for anyone to interpret the passage to coincide with their agenda or theory, any healthy, balanced perspective would take into account its incomplete nature and therefore suspend a conclusion. Especially one as hugely significant as the end of the planet and/or humankind or some variation thereof. Of course, a rough interpretation can and should be made, but it should be made by those with a background, experience, and deep knowledge of Maya script, culture, and mythos. The consensus among the experts is that a doomsday

theory is neither suggested or implied and it simply doesn't exist among educated opinions.

Mayan Astronomy

Another advancement the Maya are well known for is astronomy. They had a highly advanced system and knowledge of astronomical events and interwove it with their mythos and in more practical matters like city planning and agriculture. The astronomical event that is tied in with the 13th *baktun* and *Bolon Yukte* is that the winter solstice sun rises in conjunction with our galactic center. Nowhere is a mention of earthquakes, comets, meteors, asteroids, destruction, or catastrophe. It's neither implied nor suggested. It is a Eurocentric and western view that the Underworld is attached with evil, bad, catastrophes, etc. What has happened is New Agers came to the conclusion that since a deity that is associated with the Underworld would be present at the end of an era, it must mean we're all going to die! Silly, childish, immature, and certainly a very uneducated conclusion to the passage on Tortuguero Monument 6. However, it DOES sell books, DVDs, and generate revenue. Hence, it's presence in popular culture.

End of the World Prophecies through History

Armageddons and end of the world prophecies are nothing new. Hundreds have come and gone. On James Randi's website alone he names 44 end of the world prophecies through time. My personal favorite in modern time was the 05/05/05 prophecy. May 5th, 2005 was the date 5 planets in our solar system would align. The gravitational pull would rip our planet to shreds. Books and DVDs filled the bookstores. Documentaries were made. Some of the books were well-written by very intelligent people, backed with seemingly sound science. Of course, 05/05/05 came and went like any other day. The point is that the western world is infatuated and deeply in love with end of the world prophecies. The media is infatuated and deeply in love with sensationalism that generates revenue. The perfect formula for

a doomsday prophecy that enters pop culture and becomes mainstream.

As mentioned earlier, the Maya still exist today. Many, if not most are unfamiliar with the prophecy, even though aware of Tortuguero monument 6. Those who are aware of the prophecy, find it absurd and laughable at best, and western and/or Euro-centric arrogance at worst.

So you can stop collecting canned goods and building that underground bunker!

Sister 2 Sister Conference (March 17th)

Sister 2 Sister Conference



Registration is now open for the Sister 2 Sister Conference to be held at UMass Dartmouth on Saturday, March 17th for 75 girls ages 10 – 14. The Sister 2 Sister Conference will offer a series of workshops on topics relevant to girls today including: body image, bullying, career choices, college, health and wellness, social media, friendships, dating and relationships, diversity and empowerment.

The Sister 2 Sister conference is a great way for girls to discover themselves, make new friends and have fun along the way. The conference will be from 10:00am-2:30 pm at UMass Dartmouth Woodland Commons, located at 285 Old Westport Road in North Dartmouth. Drop off will be in front of the Woodland Commons. There will be directional signs to guide you to this spot on campus. The registration fee of \$25.00 includes all-day games, activities and lunch. Scholarships are available for qualified girls.

For more information, please call 508-999-3255 or go to www.ywcasema.org/sister-2-sister-conference to register. Hosted by YWCA Southeastern Massachusetts, UMass Dartmouth's Center for Women, Gender & Sexuality, American Association of University Women – MA, the Bristol County Sheriff's Office, the Boys and Girls Club of Greater New Bedford, The Women's Center, and Women's Fund of Southeastern Massachusetts.