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At home

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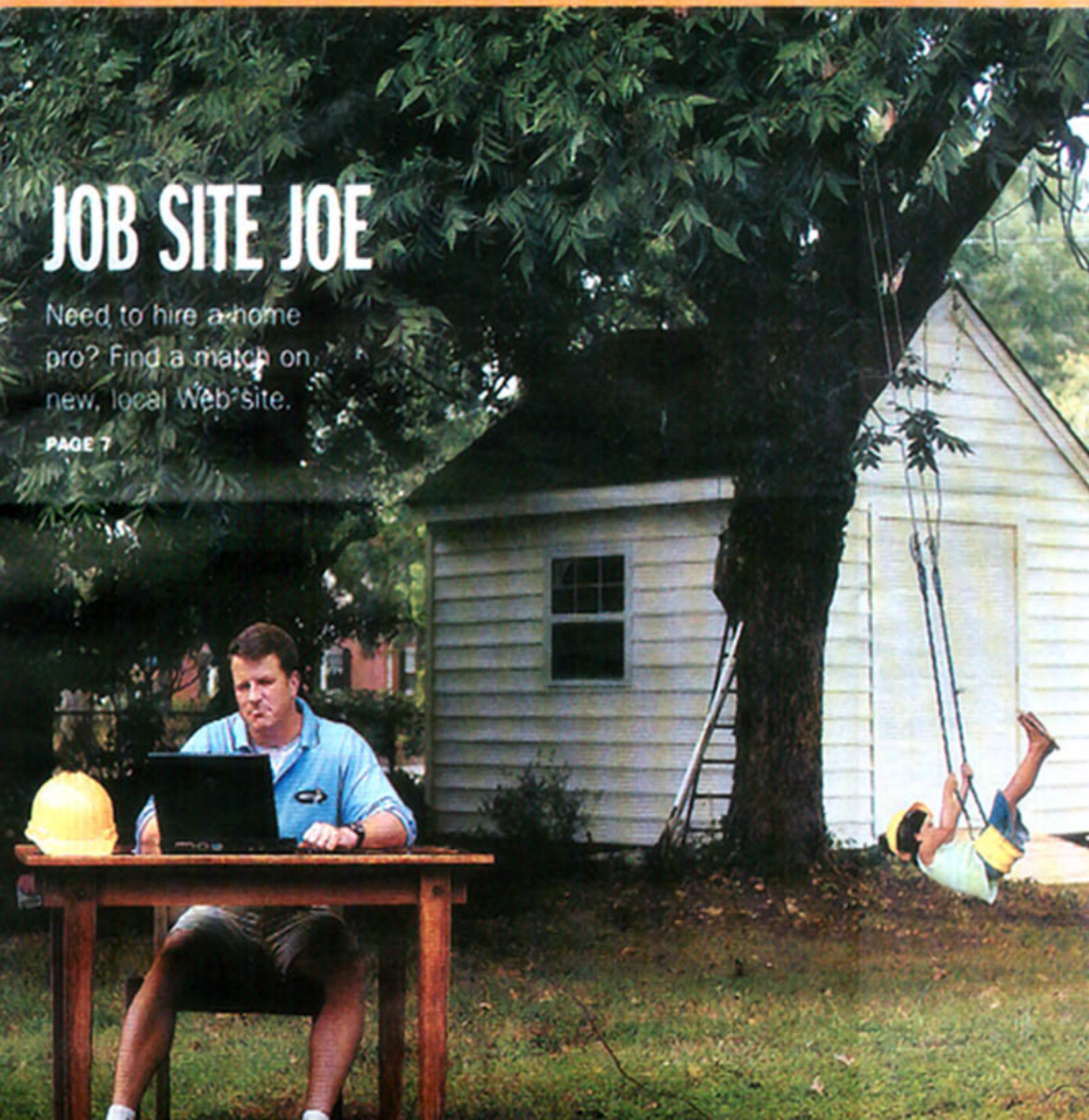
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our contest is revealed

NEXT SATURDAY

JOB SITE JOE

Need to hire a home
pro? Find a match on
new, local Web[®] site.

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Matchmaker

Web-site creator hopes to link homeowners with home pros

BY JEANNE MOONEY
THE VIRGINIAN PILOT

NORFOLK — Cmdr. Michael Crockett is trained to respond to worst-case scenarios. If a chemical, biological, nuclear or radiological mishap were to occur in the United States, or a high-yield explosive detonated, Crockett and his command would help civil authorities manage the aftermath.

Yet for all his know-how in handling dire situations, Crockett at times is stymied when he needs a home-improvement pro in a hurry.

A two-week search for a contractor to repair a tile shower floor helped Crockett reach an opinion. It's this: Good help is hard to find.

"I found it difficult to get callbacks from businesses," said Crockett, who lives in Norfolk and owns two rental properties in the city.

"Sometimes I would get lucky and get a call and someone would come by and give me an estimate. Sometimes they wouldn't."

For homeowners who also have been foiled, Crockett just launched JobSiteJoe.com, a Web site that offers them a venue to seek estimates and expertise for home and garden projects.

The Web site is free to use, focused on Hampton Roads and requires a brief registration.

"The whole site ... talks about looking out for the little guys," Crockett said. "I'm trying to make it this petri dish of activity that's going to bring both parties in." He hopes homeowners and small business owners will use the site.

The Web site offers:

■ **Joe's Estimator**, a match-making feature where homeowners can describe their needed fix-up and contractors can find potential customers.

■ **Ask-a-Joe** technical help, a forum where consumers such as Elizabeth can ask a "weird toilet question."

"When we flush our toilet a large air bubble immediately forms in the bottom of the bowl and surfaces before the water begins to drain," Elizabeth wrote on JobSiteJoe.com.

"Should we be concerned about this or could it be because we may have an older toilet?"

JobSiteJoe.com visitor "ckadlec" wrote that a new toilet was the answer. However, "jrobert," aka John, wrote that a clear vent pipe would help.

■ **Home Listings**, which real estate agents and home sellers can use for free to post properties for sale. Crockett allows five photos with every property listed on the Web site.

needed someone to replace the roof over a 6-by-10-foot den and repair the ceiling that was damaged when water leaked through the roof around a skylight.

"I think I've gotten really good results," Brown said. She has collected three estimates.

"They call me and we can set up a time where I can meet with them and they can look at the roof," Brown said. "It's not like I have to sit on the phone and call them."

Jeanell Willis, secretary of the Tidewater Builders Association's Remodelers Council, also found value in the site.

"I just thought it was a good way to reach out if you didn't know where to start," Willis said.

Willis offered a caution: buyer beware. Contractors should be licensed and insured, she said.

Crockett maintains the site but does not vet the service providers who use it.

"The homeowner will have to be their own judge of character, service and professionalism," he said.

For now, Crockett and his daughters are canvassing Norfolk neighborhoods and putting promotional fliers in homeowners' doors. His marketing campaign may be among the most modest in Hampton Roads, he said. Building and launching the site

cost about as much as a used car. "Mine is a shoestring, bootstrap, grass-roots effort," he said. His wife, Rebecca, has been his financial adviser.

Crockett has modest goals for his for-profit venture.

"I'm an active duty naval officer. I have a full-time job," he said. "This is a lot of fun to set up and create and try to get people to use."

"If I could ... fill up my advertising blocks, it'll be a very nice small income."

But he also said, "I'd be surprised if I could actually make money off the site over the next year or so."

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BOB JOSEPH FACUN/THE VIRGINIAN PILOT



JobSiteJoe.com features a business finder, property listings, a technical forum and an archive of home and garden news.

ON THE COVER: Cmdr. Michael Crockett at his laptop while daughter Madeline swings in the yard of their Larchmont home. Photo illustration by Rich-Joseph Facun/The Virginian-Pilot.

The site can accommodate 500 properties. In early August, one home — a rental that Crockett owns — was shown. Earlier this week, 14 homes were listed.

Crockett has sent out e-mails to real estate agents inviting them to use the home listing feature.

"Not trying to get money from you," Crockett said he tells them. "Just trying to populate my Web site."

■ **The Buzz**, an archive of home and garden columns and news stories collected by from the Internet by Crockett often in the early morning hours, and a classified section, can be found on the Web site. Crockett also lists links to philanthropic groups.

Susan Brown of Norfolk was one of the first to tap the site. She