

Websites of interest

MAY 15, 2011

I saved over \$500 on a round trip airplane ticket from Traverse City to Denver and back. The flight is not some bogus sojourn through ten cities with 20 ups and downs that takes a week to get where I'm going. TC to Chicago to Denver; thank you very much.

When people ask how I found this flight, I respond with one word — YAPTA. I've explained how this website works to scores of people — and if you have to buy an airline ticket you may be interested, too.

Yapta (www.yapta.com) is a search service for airline tickets and at its core acts just like other travel sites like Travelocity and Orbitz. The similarity ends there.

First, you go to Yapta.com and sign up for free. Once in, you plug in your travel dates and the airports for departure and arrival. Yapta will list the selections. When you see a flight you like, you click "Track Flight Changes" and Yapta is now watching for price drops on that flight. When the ticket price changes, Yapta sends you an alert (e-mail, Twitter, Facebook). Book it or continue watching for more drops; your choice.

If you decide to book the flight, you click on a Yapta link which goes directly to the airline's website, not some third party intermediary. You see the real flight and you book it with the actual airline. (The way Yapta makes money is via these click-throughs, not by charging you anything.)

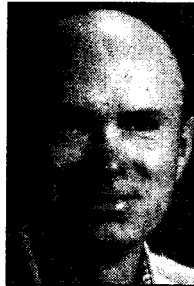
Once you buy the ticket, Yapta is still on the case.

You tell Yapta how much you paid and it will monitor that price. Most people don't know this, but if you buy a ticket directly from an airline and that airline sells that same ticket for less at a later date you are eligible for a refund for the difference. This could be a cash rebate or a voucher, depending on the airline. At any rate, Yapta will alert you to this and tell you how to claim the refund.

Since we don't live in a city with an airport offering commercial passenger flights, when I plan a trip I have Yapta track flights out of Traverse City, Grand Rapids, Flint and Detroit. You can track as many itineraries as you want.

Yapta claims they save the average traveler \$334 per year, and they've saved fliers a collective \$250 million since 2007.

Now that I've saved you all sorts of money on air travel, you may wonder what to do with all that extra cash. Wow, do I have a wonderful way for you to use your hard-earned greenbacks. Just go to Friends of Kwame (www.friendsofkwame.com) and make a donation. Yup, that Kwame. The Kilpatrick one: former mayor of Detroit, cheated on his wife with an administrative aide, bilked Detroit out of millions of dollars, took bribes. That guy.



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The website describes him as a loving husband and father and an effective leader. However, it turns out that he has no money left (or he's hiding what he does have) so he's asking for donations. You can just click a button to "help support the Kilpatrick family." I just KNOW you're rushing for your checkbook right now, eh?

Not in a giving mood? Well, how about an education website? Go to www.bringbacklicks.com. This is a site launched by a tutor in the Dallas, Texas public schools that urges the district to bring back corporal punishment. Specifically, Gilbert Leal wants to bring back the paddle. He says "the threat of licks" is just what the schools need to make the students shape up and fly right.

Interested in some giving that actually might benefit someone? How about combining a bit of spring cleaning with helping your neighbors? Today is national Give Your Stuff Away Day (www.giveyourstuffaway.com). Basically, the site wants you to put usable stuff you no longer want (like a working television or a nice easy chair) in front of your house and let anyone who wants the items have them for free.

Someone might have a use for your item. You can "shop" the neighborhood

too and maybe pick up some items you can use in your own home. It's like a big, national swap meet.

Finally, I'd like to end with a new department in the Neff Zone: "The world has gone bonkers and I can prove it." I'll end many future columns with items from this file. Here we go.

The world has gone bonkers and I can prove it: The University of Michigan has offered a women's basketball scholarship to an eighth-grader in Superior, Wisc. This was reported by the Detroit Free Press and the Duluth News Tribune among others. The scholarship to Hailey Kontny would begin in 2014. U of M officials and coach Kevin Borseth are not allowed to comment on unsigned prospects, but the girl's father said: "We're excited about it, but we're trying to keep it low-key."

I might point out that this young lady played for her middle school team this year. She has yet to play a minute of high school basketball, physically reach her growth potential, do any high school academic work, or pass the SAT. True, she can't actually sign until she's a senior in high school, but isn't this offer a tad premature? And how does offering a scholarship to an eighth grader enhance the U of M's stature as an institution? Is this bonkers or what?

JIM NEFF is a local columnist. Comments to neffzone@gmail.com. Read Neff Zone columns online at www.neffzone.com/cadillacnews.