

## **Local Members Succeed in Business**

Sometimes, Mensa members get tired of hearing the same old refrain, “If you’re so smart, why aren’t you rich?” Usually, they just shrug it off and, perhaps, reply, “Well, my life is rich; I have enough money to live on, and I enjoy my friends and my work;” however, the challenge recently spurred two local members to start an enterprise that may, indeed, make them rich.

As everyone probably knows, last summer’s Hurricane Katrina left the southern Louisiana area with thousands upon thousands of uprooted and splintered trees which must be cut up and removed before restoration of the devastated areas can even begin in earnest. Just clearing away the damaged trees is very expensive because it requires either lots of manual effort or use of special equipment or, occasionally both. Many of the damaged trees are cypress or other species that can be processed into excellent mulch, and selling this mulch would normally help defray the cost of removing the trees, but there is a small but overly abundant problem: southern Louisiana is host to the Formosa termite. This termite lives in the soil and invades and eats wet wood instead of eating the dry wood that makes up the standard termite diet. When the Hurricane Katrina wood is sold as mulch, Formosa termite colonies are possibly transferred with it, and the poor homeowners who just wanted to mulch their yards or gardens find themselves with uninvited guests that may eat their trees and shrubs and, literally, eat them out of house and home.

Enter the challenge and the local Mensans’ response. They put their intelligence to work and came up with a method of separating the termites and termite eggs from the wood. They were asked to explain the process for this article, but they refused to discuss it because they fear the details might be used by competitors. They assure us that the method does appear to work, although the process is quite costly. The two Mensans calculated that they could just break even by charging a relatively modest fee to the Gulf Coast property owners for cleanup and by selling the mulch at a very competitive price. They were aware that just breaking even doesn’t make one rich, but they had another plan. Knowing that termites are an excellent source of protein and are considered a delicacy by many people, our friends did a bit of research and discovered that, with little trouble, they could get USDA approval to process the termites and sell them for food.

Business is booming; the mulch, as they have priced it, has sold well, and they are having difficulty keeping up with the demand for the processed termites, which they offer as glazed, chocolate covered, and southern fried in addition to the usual. They did say that, if any member of the local group makes a request, they will make sure that the member has the opportunity to purchase a few ounces of his or her favorite.

Our fellow members have recently been hailed by both state and federal governments as an example of putting American know-how and initiative together to turn problems into advantages. Everyone has gained; the Louisiana citizens have a way to rid themselves of troublesome debris at low cost; mulch is available at a reasonable cost and without cutting undamaged trees, and aficionados have found a new source for a delicacy.

There is one looming problem; the source of mulch and termites from the damaged trees is limited and is being depleted rapidly. Planning ahead, our fellow members have once again shown their intelligence; they will bypass the termite-removal process for part of the mulch. This will ensure that some mulch users do get colonies of the termites and that their trees will be damaged. Our friends will soon also offer a reasonably priced service to remove termite-damaged trees in areas other than Louisiana.