

freshpair



Flip-flop fans flouting fashion

By Eddie Glenn, Press Staff Writer

They used to be called thongs, but thongs are something else now - something better discussed next Wednesday, which is National Underwear Day.

Now, those cheap little flexible plastic platforms formerly known as thongs but now more commonly known as flip-flops are becoming increasingly popular as regular, everyday footwear.

"They're really the ultimate shoe," said Rob Jones of Tahlequah. "You can slip right into them, and if they blow out, you can get another pair cheap."

At least, they used to be cheap. Some models, like Sanuk's FurReal flip-flop, lined with indoor/outdoor carpet and marketed as the "original trailer trash sandal," will set you back 30 bucks. Another model, the Sanuk Hurranchi, which has the big fat straps that go over the foot - instead of the little piece of plastic that goes between the toes - is closer to \$50; and the Donovan model is made of suede, and is about \$45.

Most flip-flops, however, can be purchased for around \$10 or less - which could explain why so many people are wearing them, even buying pairs of different colors and shades to match the rest of their wardrobe. Some NSU students have been seen wearing socks with their flip-flops - just regular socks, not the kind with the toes built in.

But regardless of their popularity, flip-flops don't seem to be the ultimate shoe for White House visits. When the Northwestern University women's lacrosse team (no relation to the Northeastern State University lacrosse team, which doesn't exist, but maybe should) recently visited the White House in flip-flops, someone evidently got so upset it made national news.

The faux pas brought flip-flops into the national spotlight, and raised the question, "Are these things really shoes, and if so, where can - and can you not - wear them?"

(Which is a really long question, but still - that's the question.)

"When I was a child, flip-flops were attire for going to the beach or the pool only," said certified etiquette and protocol consultant Leah Ingram, according to an Associated Press report. "You might get away with wearing them to the mall or the movies but you would never enter a house of worship or a government office wearing them. Unfortunately, flip-flops have become so ubiquitous that frequently I see young women wearing them to



church, to special occasions, to the office, and now, as the national media has recorded, to the White House."

Flip-flops to church? Surely God frowns upon such a thing! (Didn't Jesus wear sandals?)

Anyway, wearing flip-flops to the White House is evidently a bad thing.

What isn't so evident is how Leah Ingram got to be a genuine, bonified, "certified" etiquette and protocol consultant, and what educational institution offers such certification.

Not finding such an institution right off hand, we figured that etiquette and protocol, not unlike pornography, would be seen by the nation's courts - should they ever have to decide such a thing - as an issue determined by community standards.

So, we went out and found "Big" Will Boatman - who dresses and grooms himself in a most Cherokee County-esque manner - and bestowed upon him certification as the official Tahlequah etiquette and protocol consultant.

His opinion of flip-flops varied somewhat from Ingram's. (We were not quite prepared to ask him about thongs.)

"This is about as formal as I get," Boatman said, as he modeled his overalls and flip-flops, establishing his credentials as etiquette and protocol consultant. "Weddings, funerals, this is it."

Boatman said he'd heard about the women's sports team visiting the White House in flip-flops, and he doesn't see why such a fuss was made over the whole event.

"I was just thinking about that last night, and I was thinking, 'Who does the president think he is?.' You can't wear flip-flops around the president? Come on!"

However, Boatman - as our etiquette and protocol consultant - doesn't suggest treating all flip-flops equally. There are qualitative differences in the various brands of flip-flops, he said.

"I call flip-flops 'death shoes' because they blow out on you and you fall and kill yourself," said Boatman.

(Astute readers may have noticed that two sources for this story have now referred to the accidental destruction of flip-flops as a "blow out." This term seems to have been inspired by the Jimmy Buffet song "Margaritaville" in which Buffet sings, "I blew out my flip-flop, stepped on a pop top, cut my heel, had to cruise on back home." No previous reference to "blowing out" flip-flops have been located, as far as we know.)



Now, back to Boatman's etiquette and protocol advice.

"These are Reefs [a name-brand of flip-flops]; they're the only flip-flops I wear," said Boatman. "I was out in southern California and Gansta Mark [a friend of Boatman's] told me, 'Man, you've got to get some Reefs; you can even hike in them,' and he was right. I've had two pair now, and neither of them have blown out on me."