

Lurking Down the Bunny Trail

A springtime whodunit for sleuths
who know a bad egg when they see one!

Preview

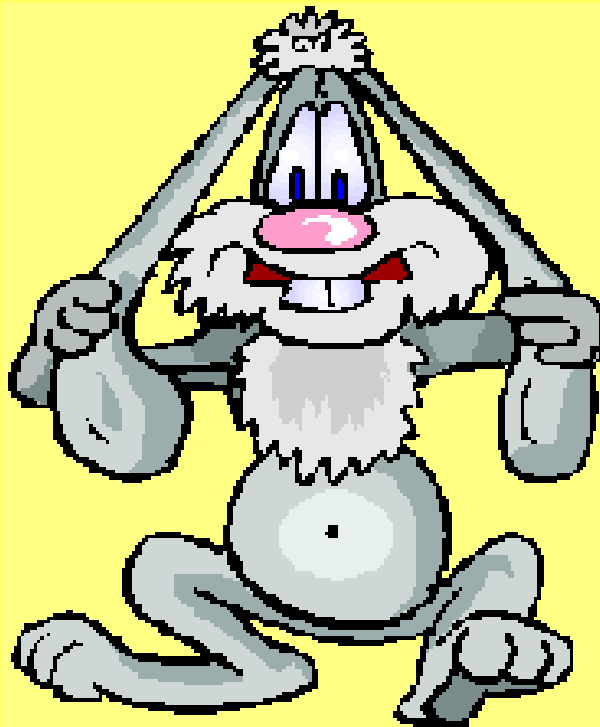


Figure out
who murdered
bunny breeder
Barney Benson
during his
busiest time
of the year.

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How to Organize "Lurking Down the Bunny Trail"

Thanks for purchasing this special springtime murder mystery. You and your guests will enjoy the challenge of solving a crime that will test everyone's powers of deduction. Here is what you should do to coordinate your murder mystery event.

STEP 1: Review the materials in this mystery packet. But ... please do it in a very specific way. Remember - you have ALL of the information, *including the solution to the mystery*. If you decide to participate in the mystery as a role player or an investigator, you'll want to keep yourself in the dark about WHO DONE IT.

All page numbers in this packet are in the upper left-hand corner of the pages as you look at them vertically. That way you can run off the material without having the page numbers interfere with the format. The entire packet includes:

- **Instructions on how to organize the event.** They're on pages 2 through 5. (You're reading them right now.)
- **Instructions for the person who will facilitate the event.** Information for the person who will take charge of the murder investigation is on page 6. You may want to give this person the title of Chief of Police. *If only 6 people are invited to the event, you'll need to assign this responsibility to one of the role players.*
- **Role Player Information.** These pages serve as a "cover letter" for the information you'll send to the *six individuals* who will be in character as the suspects. Run off six copies of pages 7 and 8 back to back. You may want to use better quality stationery for this letter.
- **The Roles.** Pages 9 through 20 contain the information you'll send with the cover letters. Each role is designed as a two-sided three-fold document. Again, run off this information back to back. *Each role player gets only the information that applies to the role that he or she is playing. Your role players should know ONLY what's in their individual packets.*
- **The Invitation to the Event.** The invitation on page 21 will be sent to each guest. It is designed to be run off as a two-fold. Or, if you decide to use heavier stock, the left side of the page can be run off back-to-back with the right side of the page.
- **Police Chief's Letter.** The letter on page 22 will be given to each guest by the facilitator upon arrival. Run off enough copies so that each person receives one.
- **Clues about the Crime.** You'll find 16 clues about the mystery on pages 23 and 24. Cut them out. *Since each guest receives a clue, you can invite up to 16 investigators, or if you double up on the clues, as many as 32 people can investigate the crime.*
- **The newspaper account of the death of Barney Benson.** Everyone will receive a copy of *The Hoppy Times* on pages 25 and 26. Run the pages off back to back.
- **The Answer Sheet.** Run off one answer sheet on page 27 for each investigative team.
- **The Denouement.** *This is the solution to the crime.* Run off pages 28 through 32. The facilitator will read these pages at the end of the evening.

STEP 2: Plan your event. Pick a date on which to conduct the murder mystery event. **The investigation takes place on the afternoon or evening of the day that Barney Benson died near the city of "Hoplando."** *Lurking Down the Bunny Trail* will take two to two-and-a-half hours to solve using the recommended format. A buffet meal is recommended.

STEP 3: Select your role players. Review the scenario and the brief descriptions of the suspects on page 7. Select guests who would fit into these roles. Send the role players their information **and** a copy of *The Hoppy Times* (pages 25 and 26) approximately 7 to 10 days before the mystery event. The role players should bring the information with them and use it as a reference when they are questioned by the investigators.

If you have only 6 guests, the role players will also be the investigators. This means you will send the invitations with the roles so that all of the information arrives at the same time.

STEP 4: Invite your guests. In advance of the event, send invitations to the event to the guests who will not be role players .

STEP 5: Select a person to facilitate the investigation. The facilitator should read the *Instructions* on page 6, and review the information in the packet to keep the event moving so that the investigation is conducted effectively.

Here's what to do at the mystery event.

STEP 6: The facilitator (Chief of Police) greets the guests. He or she gives each guest who is investigating the crime a *Chief of Police Letter with a Clue attached and The Hoppy Times inserted.* (You may want to put them in envelopes marked “Official Information from the Chief of Police.”)

If you have only 6 people at the event, and the role players are also investigating the crime, everyone receives a letter. If your event separates the role players from the investigators, then role players DO NOT receive letters. Tell the investigators they can share clues with each other at any time during the evening.

STEP 7: Conduct the Investigation. The facilitator asks everyone to sit down as the suspects give their accounts of events. Ensure that it is staged in this way:

- Remind everyone that you are in the city of Hoplando. Barney Benson died as he was flipping the switch to turn on the feeding machine in the rabbit hutch. Police believe that one of the six suspects committed the crime. They've been asked to share what they recall with everybody.
- The six role players speak in the order indicated on page 6. They stand and read the sections headlined, “Say this when asked to speak.”

STEP 8: The investigation starts. The facilitator (*with only 6 people,* this will be one of the suspects) briefly reviews what happened, including such facts as:

- Barney Benson has owned and operated Benson's Big Beautiful Bunny Boutique for the last 20 years. It's now the premier rabbit breeder in the Hoplando area.
- He died when the letter “B” from the sign on his new bunny hutch dislodged and hit him in the head.
- *Only one person committed the murder.*
- MOTIVE, MEANS and OPPORTUNITY must be considered to solve the case.

STEP 9: Form investigative teams. Have the guests who are investigating the murder form three-to-five-person investigative teams. Team members will work together to solve the case.

If only 6 people are at the event, you may (at your discretion) form two-person teams who will work together to solve the case.

STEP 10: Break for dinner or refreshments. The teams may trade clues to obtain as much information as possible while they are eating, but they cannot question the suspects yet.

If only 6 people are involved, distribute the remainder of the 16 clues at regular intervals during the meal until all clues have been used.

STEP 11: Continue the investigation. At the end of the meal, tell the teams that it is time to start the investigation again. Each team should find an area to use as an interrogation room.

If only 6 people are present, everyone stays together and role players are questioned.

STEP 12: Coordinate the questioning. Have one role player rotate to each interrogation room at seven-minute intervals. If you have fewer than six teams, work out a rotation that gives role players breaks between some of the rounds of questioning. The investigators may ask the suspects ANYTHING.

The suspects should use the information provided in the *Role Player Information* to answer the questions. Suspects should *not* withhold any bits of information, but they should not offer information unless the investigators specifically ask for it. Good investigators must ask the right questions to get the correct information.

- **After the third round of questioning,** announce that the special wrench provided by Siggys Significant Signs for installing the big new boutique sign has been found on the roof of the bunny hutch. It had no fingerprints on it.

STEP 13: Conduct open questioning. Place the suspects in different parts of the facility. For a 7-minute period, investigators from any team may go to the suspects and ask final questions.

WARNING: Some investigators will try to pull the suspects back to their teams. Don't permit this. Several different teams *may* question a suspect at the same time.

With only 6 people, anyone can ask any other role player anything.

STEP 14: Distribute Answer Sheets. Give teams 10 to 12 minutes to write out their solutions by answering the questions on the *Answer Sheet*.

STEP 15 Teams give their solutions. The facilitator asks the questions on the Answer Sheet to each team, one at a time. The teams read the answers exactly as they were written on the Answer Sheet. *NOTE: Often, a team will want to change its mind after hearing the answers from another team. Don't let this happen.*

If you have only 6 people, each role player (or two-person team of role players) gives an individual solution to the case.

STEP 16: Read “The Denouement.” The facilitator opens the envelope in which “The Denouement” was placed. The facilitator reads it aloud to the guests. This will take 6 to 8 minutes.

STEP 17: Award prizes. You may want to award prizes to the investigative team that did the best job of solving the crime. Let your creativity run wild in selecting the prizes.

Special role player information ...

(The facilitator may want to review these with the suspects prior to the start of the mystery.)

- Because this mystery is crafted with intertwining facts, the role players are provided with an abundance of information that may or may not be used during the investigation. Since the suspects will undergo interrogation by the investigative teams, the extensive number of personal facts will enable them to answer most questions that are asked. If role players are asked questions not specifically addressed in this information, the role players should answer in character based upon the other facts available to them.
- Role players **MUST** read their comments exactly as they are written. **THIS IS IMPORTANT.** It enables the investigation to begin with the correct data.
- The only relationships that the suspects know about are those written into the roles. If asked by investigators about relationships that are not mentioned in the roles, the suspects should say, “No, we’re not related.”
- All of the suspects are telling the truth with the exception of the murderer whose recollections and responses will contain lies – this is intentional and part of the murder investigation.
- Since a good investigator must ask good questions, suspects must only offer information that is asked for by the investigators. They should **NOT** offer information that has not been directly requested.

The murderer **DOES NOT** know he or she committed the crime. This means the suspects don’t have to be good liars. The solution is contained in “The Denouement.”

Have a Hopping Good Time!

Instructions for the person who will facilitate the event

If you are a role player, then you already have a formal part in the investigation. Your role as facilitator means you will have to stay in character while ensuring that the investigation is conducted effectively.

If you are not one of the six role players, you may want to create your own character and come in costume. You could be, for example, The Chief Inspector, or Lawrence Law, the Chief of Police who signed the letter on page 22. To facilitate the mystery event, do the following:

1. Review all of the information in this packet so that you are familiar with the mystery. **REMEMBER: If you are attempting to solve the crime, do NOT read “The Denouement” in advance. It contains the solution to the case.**
2. As the guests arrive, hand each of them a copy of the letter, along with a clue and a copy of *The Hoppy Times*. Tell them to talk with as many people as they can to acquire information about the crime.
3. The suspects have been told to arrive 15 minutes early. When they do, take them aside and review the *Special role player information* on page 5. Answer any questions they may have.
4. Have the role players portraying the suspects read their recollections in this order:
 - Bernie Benson
 - Willa Bildit
 - Ray Betz
 - Paul Dizzy
 - Helene Hopper
 - Cara Ott
4. Keep the event moving by following the instructions on pages 2 through 5. Make sure everything happens at the right time.
5. **If you are not one of the role players,** after you read “The Denouement,” lead the guilty party away to jail. If you want to, you can use toy handcuffs to make the arrest. If you want to stage the arrest in this way, let the suspects know you will do this.
6. Take a bow for a job well done!

Ray Betz asked you what had happened and you told him briefly about the conversation. He seemed irritated. That was strange since, if the boutique was sold, he would be out of a job. **Dizzy has been back a few more times, but Barney has turned down every offer.**

Two weeks ago, the new sign for the boutique arrived. It was manufactured by Siggy's Significant Signs, owned by Helene's brother. Bildit's staff installed the sign above the main door to the rabbit hutch, but Barney felt it wasn't done correctly. Bildit said she would fix it, but the special wrench that's required to make the final adjustments had mysteriously disappeared. When the sign's fit up it can be seen for miles. Some people say the sign is hideous. Barney said it was just good marketing. After all, he stated, an effective sign never killed anyone.

Other facts you should know:

The new feeder was **manufactured in Japan by Mitjitsu Corporation.** It was the only one of its kind in the world.

Yesterday, **Paul Dizzy met with you and Barney** about 4:15pm. He made one more offer to buy the land. You thought that the offer was extremely generous and wanted to sell. Barney refuses. Dizzy left about 5pm.

Last night, you had a date with Helene. You picked her up about 7:30pm, then realized you'd left your wallet at home. You drove to the house. **Helene waited in the car while you went inside.** You were gone for about 20 minutes because Barney wanted to talk with you about the offer. You didn't tell him Helene was in the car. Helene said that while you were gone someone with orange hair had tried to open the control panel on the hutch.

When customers would come to the boutique, **you or Barney would take them inside the hutch to help them pick out a bunny to buy.**

The lights on the bunny hutch sign are **controlled by photoelectric cells.** They go on and off automatically.

1 Say this when asked to speak:

It's hard to believe that my brother has passed away. The boutique was his life, and I guess you could say it was also his death. Barney bought the land 20 years ago and made Benson's the finest rabbit breeding operation around. I came on board last year and my brother made me a partner.

Every morning about 5:30, Barney would go to the hutch and start the new automated rabbit feeder. The controls are located near the front door. I heard the feeder start up this morning. You couldn't miss it with all the noise and vibrations. I'll bet it wakes up half of Hoplando.

Normally, it only runs for about 10 minutes. When I realized that it was still running just before six o'clock I went down to the hutch and found Barney lying on the ground, face down. That huge "B" on the sign had come loose and hit him in the head. I called an ambulance but it was too late.

That new feeder has been a problem ever since it was installed, but who would have thought this could happen? If Bildit Good Construction had done it's job, Barney would be alive right now. As far as we knew, the sign was secure. That's something else that Willa Bildit neglected to tell us. The sign wasn't installed correctly either.

I've got some hard decisions to make now. I don't have the interest in bunnies that my brother had and, since the place will now belong to me, I might accept an offer that's on the table. I'll miss you, Barn!

Lurking Down the Bunny Trail
Your Role: **Bernie Benson**

You, **Bernie Benson**, are the younger brother of Barney Benson, owner of Benson's Big Beautiful Bunny Boutique. Born 43 years ago near Hoplando, your family has been involved in animal husbandry for years. Barney was six years older than you and, it seemed to you, that mom and dad (Bernice and Ben Benson) always liked him better. Maybe that was because Barney excelled at everything he did, while you struggled.

Bad grades were one thing, but being rejected by the "in crowd" was even worse. Your Hoplando High School classmate, orange-haired **Carra Ott**, was part of the "ins." You were with the "outs." You used to hang around her and do whatever she told you to do, only to be laughed at by her friends.

Ott's family has lived in the area for many years. She was raised on a vegetable farm which she knew he would inherit some day. **You knew that she was laughing at you behind your back and you've never forgotten this.**

When you graduated from high school, you began an employment history that included a series of deadend jobs. In the meantime, Barney went to college and made some business deals that proved to be fruitful. **That's why, 20 years ago, he bought the large farm next to the Otts and decided to start a rabbit breeding operation.** But - it was just like Barney - he'd make sure that it was the best one around.

He named his operation "Benson's Big Beautiful Bunny Boutique" and **was determined to capture the market in the Hoplando area. Over the years, he did.** Barney developed a breed that he sold both to pet stores and to the public. He was a shrewd businessman, and kept his expenses down by having only a small staff.

Four years ago, you'd had enough of your brother's snide comments, so you decided to become one of his competitors. You purchased a small farm several miles away and opened "Benson's Rabbit Rendezvous." You hoped the Benson name might confuse some people into thinking that you were affiliated with Barney.

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Since you didn't have either the money or the business acumen of your brother, your bunnies were never able to compete with those bred by Barney. It soon became apparent that you'd fail.

Two years ago, your cash flow was all outward bound, so you swallowed your pride and asked Barney to help you out. **He toured your operation and laughed. He told you that the best thing you could do would be to sell out to a stranger.**

He was, he said, in a generous mood however, and he would be willing to bring you in to his operation. Since your parents were now deceased and Barney had never married, maybe (you reckoned) he was developing some sort of filial affection at this stage of his life.

So, you sold your farm last year and joined Barney. Rather than give you a big salary, he made you a part owner. You became a 10-percent partner to make up for the fact that he paid you a mere pittance of what you felt you were worth.

That's when you met **Ray Betz**, the person who was known as "The Big Bunny" at the Boutique. Ray dressed up in a rabbit costume and greeted both visitors and customers. You found out that he had been a professional entertainer and could juggle and do magic tricks. **The costume had two large pockets in the front in which Ray stored chocolate to give to kids, along with the props he needed for his juggling and magic.**

You moved into Barney's house and still live there. Of course, that meant you were next door to the vegetable farm that Carl Ott had inherited. That's when you made a plan to take a little revenge on him. And (in a small way) it would also alleviate some of the jealousy you still felt toward your brother.

Barney was meticulous about his rabbit hutch - it was always safe and secure. **You decided to sneak in when Barney wasn't around, take some of the rabbits out of the facility and release them on**

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Cara's land. You chuckled to yourself when you thought about the Benson bunnies munching on Cara Ott's carrots.

You've been doing this since you joined your brother. As a result, the Ott farm has a bury (that's a grouping of rabbits) which has been devastating Cara's produce. She noticed this and began confronting Barney about the problem. She accused Barney of being unprofessional - an accusation that made Barney bristle. You observed these confrontations and smiled to yourself.

In the meantime, however, **you have taken an interest in another person. Helene Hopper, owner of Hopper's Perfect Pet Store,** is one of the boutique's customers. When you joined Barney, he told you to deliver a new batch of bunnies to the store. You did and were attracted to Hopper immediately. You've been seeing one other socially behind Barney's back.

She told you that, five years before, **she'd contracted with your brother, making him the exclusive provider of rabbits for her store.** She'd since found another supplier and felt trapped. She asked you if you could do anything to cancel the agreement that ran five more years.

And, this year the boutique has become even more of an attraction. **Last summer, Barney completed the design of a new state-of-the-art bunny hutch to make Benson's the premier breeder in the industry.** The building even incorporated an automatic feeder and modern environmental controls. In the past, Barney had employed several part-time people to help out at the boutique. The new building meant that you and he would be able to run the entire operation by yourselves.

After looking at a few contractors, Barney hired Bildit Good Construction to complete the job. The company's owner, **Willa Bildit, spent a lot of time with Barney, but Barney never seemed to be satisfied with the way Bildit was building it.** Barney kept "making improvements" and Bildit became very frustrated.

The building was completed five months ago, but all is not well. **The new automated feeding system has problems.** Bildit says that she installed it according to the specs, but every time the feeder is switched on, the

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entire building shakes. Bildit blames Barney for the problems. Barney blames Bildit. **Barney threatened to sue Bildit if he couldn't get it right. The controls are located on the outside of the building next to the front door.**

Also about five months ago, a limo pulled into the boutique's parking lot. You watched as a man got out and began talking to The Big Bunny. Ray Betz acted as if he knew who the man was, but the man acted as if he'd never seen Ray before. A few minutes later, the man was in the house with Barney.

You went to the house and joined the conversation. That's how you found out that the man was **Paul Dizzy, whose business empire catered to children. He had started off as a cartoonist and built an entertainment empire around his most famous character, Rickey Rabbit.** You remember that a group of kids called the Rabbitickers used to be on TV as The Rickey Rabbit Club. They'd sing and dance, appealing to a preteen and teen audience.

Dizzy's amusement park, Dizzy Land, was famous worldwide and, he said, he was ready to build a huge entertainment complex to be known as Dizzy World. **The boutique was at the center of the land he needed to acquire for the complex. He offered Barney a substantial amount of money to sell the boutique.**

Since you are a minority owner, Barney had the final say in whether or not to sell - and he gave a loud "no" to the offer. Barney liked his location, he said, and he'd spent many years building his operation. You were irritated. Your 10-percent share could

have been worth a lot of money. **And, since Barney had never married, you assumed you'd be his only heir. His refusal to sell could cost you millions of dollars.** The next day, Dizzy was interviewed for the local newspaper, *The Hoppy Times*. Now the public knows the details about Dizzy World. Apparently, **Cara Ott was also holding out.** She had told Dizzy that she had a sentimental attachment to his vegetable farm. It's been in the family for 100 years.

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Your Clue #1

The manufacturer of the boutique's new sign, Siggy's Significant Signs, is one of the best sign makers in the area. The business is owned by **Helene Hopper's** brother, Siggy Hopper.

Your Clue #2

You were watching an old rerun of The Rickey Rabbit Club on TV late last night and noticed that one of the Rabbiteers, **Ray**, resembled the person who portrays "The Bug Bunny" at Benson's Big Beautiful Bunny Boutique.

Your Clue #3

Former high school classmates of **Bernie Benson** tell you that he tried to hang around with **Cara Ott** when they were in school together. Ott laughed at him behind his back.

Your Clue #4

Dizzy World, **Paul Dizzy's** proposed new amusement complex, has been on the drawing boards for the last five years. If he can't acquire all of the land he needs in Hoplando, it could take years to redo the plans.

Your Clue #5

You were at the bunny boutique last week and really enjoyed "Big Bunny" **Ray Betz's** juggling and magic act. He keeps his props in two large pockets on the front of his costume, along with chocolate and candy for the kids in the crowd.

Your Clue #6

Court records indicate that, ten year ago, **Cara Ott** and **Barney Benson** had a property dispute. Benson won and a five-acre pond that Ott thought was his turned out to belong to Benson.

Your Clue #7

Many people in the Hoplando area have complained about the new sign at Benson's boutique. It lights up the night sky and can be seen miles away.

Your Clue #8

Bernie Benson and **Helene Hopper** have been seeing each other socially. You're sure that **Barney Benson** was never informed of this because Barney and Helene haven't spoken for over a year.

THE *Special Edition* Hoppy Times



Hopping around Hoplando for half a century

Bunny Boutique Baron Bopped by Behemoth B

Bizarre death baffles bunny binions and area authorities

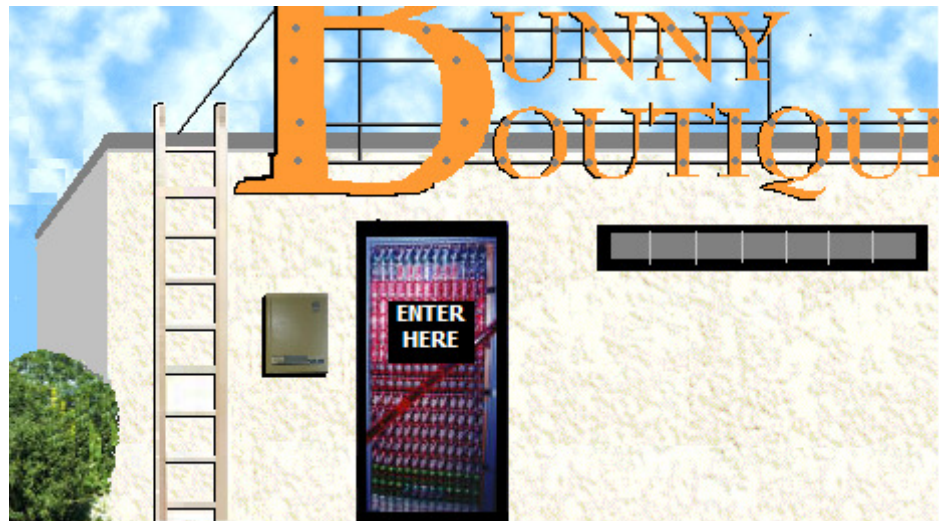
Hoplando - Barney Benson, owner of Benson's Big Beautiful Bunny Boutique, the area's premier breeder of rabbits, died early this morning, the apparent victim of a tragic construction accident.

Benson's body was found lying face down near the controls of his automated state-of-the-art rabbit feeder at the front entrance of his new rabbit hutch. Preliminary reports indicate that Benson died when the large letter "B" from a sign above the door came loose and fell on his head.

Benson's body was discovered by his brother, Bernie Benson, around 6am. Bernie Benson told police that the feeder has had problems ever since it was installed in the building. "When the feeder is activated, the entire building shakes," he stated. "Barney was really irritated about this, but nobody could figure out why we were getting the vibrations. I guess it's a real mystery."

Willa Bildit, owner of Bildit Good Construction, the general contractor for the entire project, said that both the feeder and the sign had been installed according to manufacturer specifications. She blamed any problems on Barney Benson himself who, she emphasized, kept making changes as the building was being constructed.

"If he would have just let us alone to



The bunny hutch at Benson's Big Beautiful Bunny Boutique. Owner Barney Benson's body was found near the front door this morning. Photo was taken several days ago.

do our jobs, none of this would have happened," Bildit told *The Hoppy Times*. "Any kind of change affects everything else that's being done. He just wouldn't listen when I told him that."

The sign's manufacturer, Siggy's Significant Signs, has supplied signage to Hoplando area businesses for years and has never encountered a similar situation. Owner Siggy Hopper said that special tools are shipped with each order to ensure that the signs are installed correctly. "If they did it the right way, that sign would have been tight and totally safe. I'll bet they didn't follow the instructions," he speculated.

A calm Bernie Benson said, "For the time being, it'll be business as usual at the boutique. When ownership officially passes to me, you might see something happen. I've been a partner in this operation since last year, you know. Sure my brother got his way on everything, but

Giant amusement complex could soon be Hoplando reality

Southern California - Officials at Dizzy Studios announced late this morning that plans to construct the world's largest entertainment complex are "full speed ahead."

Paul Dizzy, the man who created a business empire out of his cartoon character, Rickey Rabbit, has been in the Hoplando for several months, purchasing land and making final arrangements for the project.

"We had some delays," he told reporters, "but, as of today, we're confident we can work things out."

The new complex, to be called Dizzy World, is slated to be built on several thousand acres of land outside the city.

Continued on back page