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John Kelly's Washington

Metro columnist

A Device That Drives Squirrels Nuts

By [John Kelly](#)
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I haven't met *Bill Earl* in person. I've only talked to him on the phone. But when I think of Bill, I imagine [Robert Shaw](#) as Quint, the crusty shark hunter in [Steven Spielberg's](#) "Jaws."

"They come at you," Bill told me not long ago. "They rush right at you. If you're near their hole, they charge you. They're able to read you, actually."



Bill Earl, left, and Mike DeGinto's strobe drives squirrels from attics. (Courtesy Of Mike Deginto)

He was talking about a creature he has spent much time studying: *Sciurus carolinensis*, the common gray squirrel. Bill, 59, repairs roofs and gutters not far from Valley Forge, Pa., and so is often called upon to fix the damage caused by the marauding, bushy-tailed beasts.

"They're so much smarter than I ever dreamed possible," he continued. "They work in groups."

Sort of like the velociraptors in "Jurassic Park."

Squirrels are cute when they are frolicking in the park. They are not so cute when they are exploding from a hole in a soffit -- furry balls of coiled anger, their lifeless doll's eyes rolling over in their pointy heads. Bill has been known to take a neighbor with him on squirrel calls "to watch my back, because I don't know what they're gonna do." (In my biopic about Bill -- "Nuts!" -- the neighbor will be a squirrel biologist played by [Richard Dreyfuss](#).)

Often, Bill would close up the holes that had allowed the squirrels in only to find the rodents digging *their* way back in, clawing or gnawing through shingles and roof decking, even through aluminum. When generations of squirrels have been living in your attic for 10 or 20 years, he said, they tend to think of it as their home, not yours.

Bill pondered the ways humans have chosen to deal with squirrels -- poisoning, shooting, trapping -- and

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decided no one had tried to *annoy* them into submission. That is Bill Earl's great contribution to pest control: He's the first man to think of ticking squirrels off.

"I thought of the old disco lights," he said. Bill contacted his friend *Mike DeGinto*, who works at an electrical and lighting supply shop in Pennsylvania. And thus was born the Evictor, a high-intensity strobe light that flashes 92 times a minute. Bill and

Mike say if you install enough in your attic to illuminate every last dark corner the squirrels will, um, high-tail it.

"The reason they leave is it's so very annoying," Bill said. "It's very, very annoying. The squirrels can't get past that. They decide it's a bad place to raise their young."

It's like living in a cheesy '70s nightclub -- a perpetual cheesy '70s nightclub, Studio 54 with a cocaine-addled DJ who refuses to stop the checkerboard dance floor from pulsating.

Either that or [Abu Ghraib](#), where the [U.S. military](#) reportedly turned strobe lights on prisoners as a way of inducing nausea and general unease. Bill said that when a guy came out from the Philadelphia [NBC](#) affiliate to see the Evictor in action, the reporter reported feeling sick to his stomach. (Hey, maybe there's a secondary market for these: keeping local-TV hacks out of your house.)

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