



heavy petting

THE SIXTH ANNUAL HUMANE SOCIETY PET EXPO IS HELD FROM 9 A.M.-5 P.M. ON SATURDAY, FEB. 18 AND FROM 11 A.M.-5 P.M. ON SUNDAY, FEB. 19 AT THE JACKSONVILLE FAIRGROUNDS, FAIRGROUNDS PLACE, JACKSONVILLE. AUDITIONS FOR "THE LATE SHOW WITH DAVID LETTERMAN" STUPID HUMAN AND PET TRICKS ARE HELD FROM 11 A.M.-1 P.M. AND FROM 2-4 P.M. ON FEB. 18. PROCEEDS BENEFIT THE JACKSONVILLE HUMANE SOCIETY. 725-8766.

ANOREXIA & ASSOCIATED DISORDERS

This support group gets together from 6:15-7:15 p.m. every Mon., Wed. and Fri. at Wekiva Springs Wellness Center, 3947 Salisbury Road, Jacksonville. 296-3533.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The Northeast Florida Anthropological Society gets together from 6-8 p.m. on the first Wed. of each month at the San Marco Public Library, 1565 Hendricks Ave., Jacksonville. 565-2343.

ANTIQUÉ AUTOMOBILE CLUB

The Northeast Florida Region Antique Automobile Club gets together at 7 p.m. on the second Thur. of every month at Piccadilly Restaurant, 5950 Ramona Blvd., Jacksonville. 641-5864.

ART EDUCATION

Registration for "Art for Art's Sake" classes is underway at Jacksonville University, 2800 University Blvd. N., Jacksonville. 744-3950.

ASSOCIATION OF ASTROLOGY OF NORTH FLORIDA

The AANF gets together at 7 p.m. on the fourth Tue. of each month at C.C.O.T., 1637 Hamilton St., Jacksonville. 641-4121 or 620-0031.

ATTACHMENT PARENTING INTERNATIONAL

This parental support group meets from 10 a.m.-noon the fourth Thur. of every month at the Pablo Creek Regional Library, 13295 Beach Blvd., Jacksonville. Healthy babies and children are welcome. 886-0847.

AUDUBON SOCIETY OF DUVAL

Serving Clay, Duval and Nassau counties, this group meets at 7:30 p.m. on the third Mon. of every month September through April at Swaim Memorial United Methodist Church, 1620 Naldo Ave., Jacksonville. 733-0550.

BACKGAMMON GROUP

Backgammon players of all levels meet at 1 p.m. every Sun. at River City Brewing Company, 835 Museum Circle, Jacksonville. 731-8342.

BEACHES MOTHERS & MORE

This group for moms and kids meets at 7 p.m. every first and third Mon. of the month at the Pablo Creek Regional Library, 13295 Beach Blvd., Jacksonville. 858-3372.

BEAR FOUNDATION

The Bear Foundation, an organization that saves and

adopts stray kittens and cats, needs volunteers for a variety of jobs. Monthly meetings are held at 7 p.m. on the last Wed. of each month at the Ponte Vedra Beach Library, located on A1A in Ponte Vedra Beach. 285-4687.

BINGO

Outreach America hosts bingo to support The Community Hospice Foundation at 7 p.m. every Wed. at 236 Industrial Loop, Orange Park. 596-6359.

BRILLE VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are needed to translate textbooks and fiction into Braille for the visually impaired at Ahavath Chesed Temple, 8727 San Jose Blvd., Jacksonville. 379-9947.

BUDDHISM PRACTICE

Tibetan Buddhist silent sitting meditation is held from 6:45-8 p.m. every Tue. and Wed. and from 10-10:30 a.m. every Sat. Chanting meditation follows the Sat. session. Admission is free. 389-6885.

BUDDHIST MEDITATION

Classes meet from 6:30-8 p.m. every Sun. at Discovery Yoga, 3 Davis Street, St. Augustine. (386) 246-4092.

CHALLENGE PROGRAM

Handicapped people are invited to Joan Coffman's aqua-aerobics program at 11 a.m., noon and 1 p.m. every Tue. at the Jewish Community Alliance, 8505 San Jose Blvd., Jacksonville. A wheelchair lift is provided and admission is free to the disabled. To register, call 730-2100.

CHESS NIGHT

The League of Extra Ordinary Chess Players gets together to play chess from 6:30-11 p.m. every Thurs. at Fuel Coffeehouse, 1037 Park St., Jacksonville. 268-7816.

CITIZENS FOR A UNITED AMERICA

This grassroots organization seeks volunteers. 391-4115.

CITIZENS IN ACTION

This group discusses community issues at 8 p.m. every Thur. at Loose Screws, 125 B King St., St. Augustine. Admission is free. 824-5565.

CO-DEPENDENTS ANONYMOUS

This support group meets at 7 p.m. every Thur. at JABA Club, 3645 Spring Park Road, Jacksonville. 743-2776.

COOKING INSTRUCTION

A cooking course is held at 7 p.m. every Thur. at Williams-Sonoma, 10300 Southside Blvd., Jacksonville. Admission is \$40. 538-0750.

inyourcorner

A MATTER OF TRUST



BY EDDIE FARAH

Zakiya Kennedy was a pretty, 18-year-old aspiring model and New York City college student with big dreams of a future in the fashion world. But two years ago, that future ended when Zakiya collapsed in an Upper West Side subway station complaining of a severe pain in her head and leg. She died an hour later at a nearby hospital.

The medical examiner confirmed that Zakiya died when a blood clot entered her lung, ruled to be a side-effect of the contraceptive patch she was wearing. Kennedy had switched to the patch about three weeks before her death.

The Ortho Evra patch has been on the market since 2002 and is advertised by models and athletes as a sexy and discrete alternative to birth control pills. Made by Ortho-McNeil, a subsidiary of Johnson and Johnson, the adhesive square is applied weekly, can be hidden below the waistline and delivers the same hormones as the pill — progestin and estrogen. Like the pill, it prevents the ovaries from releasing an egg that can result in pregnancy. Four million users are 95 percent satisfied with the patch, says the maker.

But a growing number are not. A pulmonary embolism — a lung clot — heads the list of severe side effects linked to its use, along with strokes, heart attack, leg pain, swelling and shortness of breath. To date, the patch has been listed as the probable cause of at least 17 deaths and more than 60 life-threatening complications in mostly young women.

Critics argue that Ortho-McNeil knew about the potential health risks but did nothing to warn the public. Files from the FDA, obtained by the Associated Press, show about 16,000 reports of adverse effects associated with the patch. The risk of dying or suffering nonfatal blood clots from the patch was three times that of the pill. But when the patch was approved, there were no requirements for follow-up studies.

The number of lawsuits has been growing — a 25-year-old mother of two from Baychester, N.Y., who died from a heart attack after six weeks on the patch; a 37-year-old mother of two

who suffered a massive stroke, paralyzed after using the patch for 12 days; a 25-year-old living with 20 percent lung capacity, blamed for a pulmonary embolism. And the list is likely to go on.

In November, the FDA finally forced Ortho-McNeil to prominently display a warning: "You will be exposed to about 60 percent more estrogen if you use ORTHO EVRA® than if you use a typical birth control pill containing 35 micrograms of estrogen." The question still unanswered is whether delivering the hormone directly into the bloodstream increases the risks of clots.

At Ortho.com, pretty pink, sage green and taupe tones enhance young models, with a warning that most side effects of the patch are "not serious" unless you smoke, have a history of heart disease, blood clots

Ortho-McNeil knew about the potential health risks — pulmonary embolisms, strokes, heart attacks, leg pain, swelling and shortness of breath — but did nothing to warn the public.

or certain cancers. There is no mention of the medical examiners' findings linking the patch to the deaths of many young women.

When our regulatory agencies act more like approval agencies, tougher standards for new drugs are not applied. The system is broken. Thorough, extensive testing should be done before a drug is released to the public. Why was the three-fold risk associated with an increase in non-fatal

blood clots not investigated further? Why only now are two epidemiological studies underway to determine whether the patch has the same risks as the pill use — something that might have been answered prior to the drug's approval?

Additional research means a little less profit for the drug company, certainly, but the price the young women paid — their lives — is too great a cost for society. There is nothing frivolous about the death of a young person who believed the promises of a drug company and paid for that trust with her life. EF

Be sure to catch Eddie Farah's live call-in radio show noon to 1 p.m. every Saturday on 690 WOKV AM! The call-in number is 340-0690.