

HAPPENINGS

cyclists of all levels, from 6-8 p.m. on May 17 at Bicycles Etc., 8036 Philips Highway Jacksonville. Discussions regarding clothing, accessories and training are held. 733-9030.

ANIMAL RIGHTS FOUNDATION PROTEST

The Animal Rights Foundation of Florida protests St. Augustine's horse-drawn carriages. For the location of the protest and how to participate, call (407) 699-7771.

COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT FORUM

Citizens In Action (C.I.A.), an activist collective, assembles the first and third Thur. every month at 9 p.m. at Loose Screws, 125 B King St., St. Augustine. 824-5565.

REPTILE RESCUE

The Jacksonville Herpetological Society discusses reptile conservation and education at 7:30 p.m. the first Wed. of every month at the Jacksonville Museum of Science and History, 1025 Museum Circle, Jacksonville. 881-9591.

OUTDOOR EVENTS

HYPERLITE WAKE TOUR

"Endless Summer" star Robert August signs autographs at this wakeboarding event at 9 a.m. on May 13 at Victory Lake, located on Victory Lake Road, located on Jacksonville's Westside. 854-WAKE.

RIDE-A-THON AT AMELIA ISLAND STATE PARK

The third annual Ride-a-Thon and open house is held from 2-6 p.m. on May 14 at the Kelly Seahorse Ranch, located at Amelia Island State Park. Horseback rides, a ranger program, light refreshments and door prizes are featured. 251-2320.

KAYAK BENEFIT PADDLE

A kayak paddle is held at 8:45 a.m. on May 13 at Silver River at Silver Springs. Proceeds benefit the Stetson Kennedy Foundation. 891-4185.

MIGRATORY BIRD DAY

The International Migratory Bird Day Celebration is held on May 13 at the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, located off Route 40, near Folkston, Ga. An early-morning bird walk, exhibits and a night-time Owl Prowl are featured. (912) 496-7836.

SEGWAY GUIDED TOURS ON FT. GEORGE

Cross-terrain Segways are available for tours of the natural and ecological preserve. Tours are two hours, twice a day, 10 a.m.-noon and from 2-4 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday, at a cost of \$69. Call 251-9477 for reservations.

BLACK CREEK OUTFITTERS

Kayak instruction is offered from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. every Sun.

• Half-day and day kayak trips are also offered • Two-hour climbing sessions for beginners are held from 8:30-11:30 a.m. every Sat. Admission is \$50 • 10051 Skinner Lake Drive, Jacksonville. For reservations, call 645-7003.

KAYAK EXPERIENCE

The Great Outdoors Kayak Experience offers backwater tours for small groups. For reservations, call 755-8080.

ARMY NAVY OUTDOORS

A free kayak outing is offered on the second Sat. of each month. A free kayak demonstration is offered on every remaining Sat. • Army Navy is located at 127 Monument Road, Jacksonville. For directions to the sites, call 725-5000.

OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

Guided coastal kayaking and canoeing trips for small groups and corporate outings are offered. Destinations include the Barrier Islands, Timucuan Preserve, St. Augustine and the St. Johns River. For departure times and locations, call 393-9030.

NAUTICAL ESCAPES

Kayaking with dolphins is offered during the Ocean Kayak Tour from 8:30 a.m.-1 p.m. every Sun. • A trip to Dutton Island features kayaking and hiking from 8:30-11 a.m. Mon.-Fri. • A sunset outing is offered from 7:30-9:30 p.m. daily • Admission to all tours is \$40 • 568-0284.

ECOLOGICAL TOURS

Daily kayaking ecological tours are offered from Gecko Latitudes in St. Augustine. For departure times and locations, call 824-7979.

FLORIDA SEA KAYAKING ASSOCIATION

Free kayak events are held throughout the year. For a schedule of events, call 699-3720.

SIDETRACKERS

This outdoors singles club meets at 6:30 p.m. on the first Wed. of every month at the Southeast Regional Library, 10599 Deerwood Park Blvd. Jacksonville. 821-6707.

KAYAK ADVENTURES

Kayaking tours for the disabled are offered. 249-6200.

WRITING, BOOKS AND LITERATURE

THE BOOKMARK

Southern author Dorothea Benton Frank signs her book "Full of Grace" at 3 p.m. on May 11 at The Bookmark, 299 Atlantic Blvd., Atlantic Beach. 241-9026.

BARNES & NOBLE MANDARIN

John Grogan, author of "Marley & Me," is in at 7 p.m. on May 11 • A short-story and creative writing class is offered at 6:30 p.m. on the

second Tue. of every month • Promoting Outstanding Writers meets at 11 a.m. on the third Sat. of every month • 11112 San Jose Blvd., Ste. 8, Jacksonville. 886-9904.

MUCH ADO ABOUT BOOKS

This book festival is held 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m. on May 13 at Hyatt Regency Jacksonville, 225 E. Coastline Drive, Jacksonville. Author-hosted discussion panels and a vast selection of books are featured. James Patterson, Heather Graham, Tim Dorsey, Steve Berry and John Grogan are among the writers appearing. 630-1995.

CORRESPONDENT MIKE LEONARD

"Today" correspondent and author Mike Leonard signs his book "The Ride of Our Lives" at 7 p.m. on May 16 at Books-A-Million, 738 Marsh Landing Parkway, Jacksonville Beach. 273-8055.

BOOK CLUB DISCUSSIONS

Community advocate Mary Kohnke discusses her book, "She Said What?" at 7 p.m. on May 16 at the Main Library, 1960 Ponce de Leon Blvd., St. Augustine and at 2 p.m. on May 21 at the Southeast Branch Library. "The Time Traveler's Wife," by Audrey Niffenegger, is discussed at 7 p.m. on May 25 at the Southeast Branch Library, 6670 U.S. 1 S., St. Augustine 827-6900.

FIRST COAST ROMANCE WRITERS

This group gets together from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. every second Sat. of each month at the West Regional Branch Library, 1425 Chaffee Road, Jacksonville. Admission is \$25. 268-0707.

HUMANIST BOOK DISCUSSION

Books of interest to humanists are discussed at 2 p.m. on the third Sun. of every month at Borders Books and Music, 8801 Southside Blvd., Jacksonville. Sponsored by firstcoastfreethought society.org. 996-1553.

LITERACY COALITION

The Clay County Literacy Coalition gets together at 4 p.m. on the third Tue. of each month at Orange Park High School's Adult Education Wing, 2300 Kingsley Ave., Orange Park. The "Tutor Round Table" meets from 7-8:30 p.m. on the third Thur. of each month at the Orange Park Library, 2054 Plainfield Ave., Orange Park. 272-8154.

NOVEL INTO FILM DISCUSSION

A film is shown at 2:30 p.m. on the second Sat. of each month and a discussion of the film — and the book on which it's based — is held at 6:30 p.m. the following Wed., at Pablo Creek Regional Branch Library, 13295 Beach Blvd., Jacksonville. 992-7101.

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EVERY PARENT'S WORST NIGHTMARE HOW ANY PARENT CAN PREVENT IT



BY EDDIE FARAH

She would have been 11 years old this summer.

But Virginia Graeme (pronounced Graham) Baker died in a Virginia pool spa on a sunny summer day in 2002. Graeme, a bright-eyed, smiling girl — and swim team member — was at a neighbor's pool party celebrating her sister's high school graduation. Parents were chatting nearby. Other kids were in the pool.

Graeme's older sister ran toward Nancy, their mother, screaming, "Mommy, Mommy, Graeme's in the hot tub!" The seven-year-old's body covered the grate on the spa floor, suctioned by hundreds of pounds of pressure, holding her underwater for nearly 10 minutes.

Nancy couldn't pull the child out alone. Two men were able to finally, using enough force to shatter the flat 8-inch grate.

Graeme was pronounced dead at the hospital. Nancy relives the image of her little girl, her eyes closed, her arms moving lifelessly with the current. It's often her first thought in the morning and the last one at night.

At the funeral, Graeme's grandfather, former Secretary of State James Baker (under former Pres. George Bush) promised to hold the pool and spa industry accountable. On May 2, he made good on that promise.

Speaking for the first time about his granddaughter's death, James A. Baker and daughter-in-law Nancy Baker announced their support last week for new legislation to be introduced to prevent drowning by entrapment in a pool or spa.

"Before it happened, I didn't think it was possible that a child could be entrapped in the drain of a spa," Ms. Baker said at a news conference. "I jumped in, and pulled and pulled and pulled, and I couldn't remove her. I thought at the time that she'd been murdered, that she was wired down. I'd never heard of entrapment."

And most parents haven't either. A survey of parents who own pools shows only 15 percent have safety equipment that would prevent entrapment — anti-vortex drain covers and 12 percent have safety vacuum emergency release systems (SVRs) in place.

From 1985 through March 2002, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission recorded 147 body and hair entrapments, 36 resulting in

death. But accurate numbers are difficult to ascertain. Most drownings, including Graeme's, are listed simply as "drowned person" and do not specify entrapment.

In 2002, in Florida alone, 335 children drowned — leading the nation in preventable childhood drownings.

The legislation by Florida's Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL) would provide incentive grants for states that make pool and spa safety devices mandatory such as drain covers, vacuum release systems, multiple drains to spread out the suction force and four-sided fences. But Schultz is no friend of the pool and spa industry.

In 2000, when she was a member of the Florida legislature, she tried to enact an anti-entrapment bill but was opposed by the pool and spa industry trying to avoid regulatory burdens. After a compromise version of the bill passed requiring only fences, a pool owner sued the state of Florida. It's believed the industry backed that lawsuit.

While legislation is one solution, litigation is another. The Bakers filed a lawsuit against the maker of the pool pump. They settled for an undisclosed amount. And in 2003, a Miami jury awarded the largest judgment to date against a pump manufacturer, awarding \$104 million for the suction entrapment of teenager Lorenzo Peterson, who was left in a vegetative state.

But don't wait for legislation or litigation or for the industry to clean up its act. National Safe Kids Week (April 29-May 7) has brought the issue to our attention. You can prevent the problem yourself. A \$60 anti-entrapment drain and review of your pool's safety features will put your mind at ease. A pool alarm is about five bucks. Support mandatory standards through your lawmakers.

And don't let your pool professional tell you "it doesn't happen very often." Even one tragic accident is one too many.

Nancy Baker is determined to ensure her daughter's death was not in vain.

"Graeme is a powerful angel," she adds. "I'm just working on her behalf." 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.

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