The Burr

Packing Perspectives
Editor’s comments

"The story you are about to see is true. The names have been changed to protect the innocent."

That’s a fine premise for a television show, but not such a good idea in journalism. In general, anonymous sources are looked on with suspicion, as though they simply have an ax to grind or don’t want to be responsible for their actions. Whatever the reason, anonymous sources are justly viewed with suspicion, not only by readers but also by journalists.

But in this issue, we have three stories that revolve around anonymous people: Tim Bugansky’s story on abortion, Mandy Jenkins’ story on human papilloma virus and Phil Novak’s story about a pot dealer. With anonymous sources viewed as they are, one story based on such a person in a publication this size may be OK. To publish three such stories is risky. But I think it’s a risk worth taking.

What we want to do with this edition is to address issues students deal with. As is clear in the stories, pot dealing (and particularly smoking), HPV and abortions are common issues on campus.

We felt in these instances, anonymous sources were fine because these aren’t stories about individuals. They’re stories about issues and occurrences, and discussing those issues is more important than discussing any individual person dealing with those issues. The point of these stories is to invite you to think about what you would do if you unexpectedly became pregnant (both women in Bugansky’s piece “urge” all women to consider what they’d do if they were to get pregnant), help you realize you’re not alone if you get HPV ... or, for that matter, if you spend too much time smoking marijuana.

If you don’t fall into the latter category, I think you’ll find the story an enjoyable look at a very different sort of college experience.

It was important to us that the abortion and pot dealer stories not be the same old thing. I think you’ll find they aren’t.

But those aren’t the only issues we tackle in this edition. Megan Battista examines a skinhead group based in Kent. Mark Cina looks at two Kent residents who were raised by lesbian parents, and Allison Waltz presents us with a visual look at Falun Gong and its practitioners, a group persecuted in its homeland of China. For those stories we have identified sources, and we’d like to thank those sources for their candi dness.

Not all the stories in this magazine are deep, probing pieces. Ryan Dezember visits an inner-city charter school started by Edward Crosby, founder of Kent State’s Pan-African Studies department. Sarah Jenkins visits a local psychic/belly dancer/tarot-card reader. Jennifer Kovacs profiles a student with a morbid ambition: to become a funeral director and embalmer. And Adam Gibbs searches for love in all the virtual places.

The CyBurr, our online companion that won second place in the 2001 Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication student magazine contest, will feature three CyBurr documentaries and two exclusive stories. So surf on by and check it out at www.burr.kent.edu.

I’d like to thank everyone whose name is listed at the bottom of this page. Their talents and dedication have made this issue what it is.

I hope you find the stories relevant, but more importantly, that you find the stories entertaining.

Enjoy.

Dave Schafer
You are a woman. You are pregnant.
Two women explain why they chose to have abortions

HPV
Many of the millions who get this cancer-causing STD each year don't even know it exists

singlewhitemale@kent.edu
Searching for love on the Internet

Your guide to the mystical
In Carrie Kohnya's home, you can get spiritual advice, get a psychic reading or learn how to belly dance

Charting a new course
This inner-city school is approaching education on a personal level

Body snatcher
‘Yes, I work for a funeral home and want to be a funeral director’

Living the high life
Spend an afternoon with a small-time marijuana dealer

Falun Gong
Marching and meditating for peace

Hate comes to Kent
A group of skinheads has made Portage County its home

MOMOM
Two Kent residents, four mothers

Faith-based initiative
More students are turning to religious groups to find companions and comfort

CyBurr exclusives

Stories
The legend of Gyro Bob  Bob Tanner has built a fan base among late-night bar hoppers
Panic, attacked  After Sept. 11, Americans are frightened, and scared people often do pretty weird things

CyBurr documentaries

Eli Reed: Changing the world one image at a time
The last chord: Looking for jazz in Cleveland
Renard's kid gloves: The fight through adolescence
You are a woman.

You are pregnant.

You have something inside you, something some people call developing fetal tissue, something others call a human being with a soul. Something you didn't count on.

It is on your mind and in your body. You wonder whom to tell — your parents? Anyone? You wonder what to do.

Megan was that woman in June 1999, Daphne in July 2000. Both chose to have abortions. Megan, a 22-year-old Kent State graduate, is confident she made the right decision. Daphne, a 21-year-old Kent State student, felt certain at the time. But looking back, she has second thoughts.

Nationally, some 1.5 million women have abortions every year, according to the National Abortion Federation. The Ohio Department of Health says 37,041 abortions were performed statewide in 1999. Of these, 85 percent involved pregnancies of up to 12 weeks. And 53 percent involved women up to age 24.

Abortion is the choice when a woman runs out of choices, says Jude Anderson, patient educator/counselor at the Akron Women's Medical Group, the clinic where Megan and Daphne had abortions.

"No woman wants to have an abortion," Anderson says. "That's never her first choice. You have to do something that's against every woman's basic instinct to nurture."

She says women most frequently
I to seven-minute procedure, especially insurance. And a woman who tries to have abortions because they cannot afford to raise a child. Some do not have insurance. Some simply are not ready to be mothers. Children need both emotional and financial support, Anderson stresses. And a woman who tries to raise a child before she's ready exposes her infant to "an emotional desert."

"Until a woman is prepared in her mind, she's not prepared to be a mother. It's an awesome task," Anderson says. "I don't care what their reasoning is. We won't judge them."

The Choice Before the Choice

Megan grew up with cousins who got pregnant and gave birth in their early teens. They did not go to college. They work minimum-wage jobs while caring for their children.

"I had always made up my mind that I was better than getting pregnant when I was not married and very young," she says. "I didn't want that to happen to me because I had so many goals and things I wanted to accomplish. To tug around a 2-year-old — I wouldn't be able to do anything that I'm doing now."

So Megan resolved that if she ever did get unintentionally pregnant, she would abort.

Megan had been dating her boyfriend for about three weeks when she got pregnant. The sonogram performed at the abortion clinic seven weeks later pinpointed the first day they had sex as the date of conception. Megan was not taking birth control. Her boyfriend did not use a condom.

Daphne had considered the possibility of being pregnant, like she supposes any sexually active woman does.

"At some point in time, of course, it crosses your mind: 'What if I get pregnant?'" she says. "In my head there was no way... I'd always say I would probably have an abortion."

When it came time to decide, she thought of school. She couldn't imagine caring for a baby while in college. She couldn't imagine what her family would think about a child born out of wedlock.

Daphne and her boyfriend had been together six months when she got pregnant. She was taking birth-control pills. She never missed a day. She was just off an hour or two a few times — but it must have been enough.

Neither of the women's boyfriends was anxious to be a father.

"With him, there was no option," Megan recalls. "You're going to have an abortion, right?" she says was his initial reaction.

"He obviously did not want to have a child with a girl he'd just started dating. We didn't want to be parents together."

But he ultimately left the choice to her. Throughout the entire process, Megan says, he was supportive. Daphne's boyfriend also let her decide, though she could tell he hoped she'd abort.

Actually being pregnant was far different than just thinking about it. Megan was still resolved to abort. She was ready mentally but admits she was unprepared for the emotional "whirlwind" that overwhelmed her. Daphne, previously so sure, began to have second thoughts.

Both women were sick during the days leading up to their abortions — physically sick from their pregnancies and nearly sick with a constant flurry of emotions. And, in Daphne's case, subtle doubts.

"Everything you can think of just runs through your head," Daphne says. "Constantly, 'Am I doing the right thing? Am I not doing the right thing?'"

The Abortion

The Akron Women's Medical Group is on the second floor of a nondescript, two-story office building. Outside it looks like a doctor's office — except for the buzzer and intercom to gain entry. The waiting room is like any other: blinds on the windows, pink chairs and a big-screen TV. There is a reception desk covered with phones and paperwork. Beyond the waiting room, it resembles a typical women's clinic with examination rooms, padded tables with metal stirrups and a sonogram machine.

In 2000, this clinic averaged about 142 first-trimester abortions a month, performing over 1,700 the whole year.

The clinic is clean and sterile. Abortion clinics are not "these dark, back-street, dirty places," Anderson says, despite what many people picture.

A few elements set the Akron Women's Medical Group apart from most doctors' offices. In the back is a three-foot high, cabinet-like machine with a thin tube attached to it. This machine is used to perform abortions. There is a recovery area with cots where women rest while the anesthetic fades. There are oxygen tanks, defibrillator paddles and other emergency equipment in case something should go wrong.

"So far, nothing has." Megan and Daphne clearly remember their eight-hour days at the clinic. The emerging biological stress of being pregnant and the emotional stress associated with their decisions have forever etched the experiences in their memories.

Their boyfriends accompanied them. For that, Megan and Daphne both consider themselves lucky. Anderson says, at most, one in 10 men involved in creating a pregnancy is at the clinic when it is terminated.

"Usually, if he comes at all, he drops her off and gets the hell out of there as fast as he can," Anderson says, not without a hint of dismay. "Not only should he stay here with her, he should be doing everything he can to alleviate the stress this is making on her. Because they made this thing together."

All day is a long time to wait for a five- to seven-minute procedure, especially an abortion. Megan and Daphne arrived at the clinic in the early morning. They could not eat anything. They brought urine, an additional method to confirm pregnancies.
The women sat in the waiting room. They filled out papers: consent for an ultrasound, consent for an abortion, medical history, emergency contact information, choice of anesthesia. They turned in the papers and showed picture IDs. Their boyfriends paid for the abortions.

They sat in the waiting room. And they waited. They had ultrasounds to confirm their pregnancies. They talked to a counselor, probably Anderson. The counselor reviewed the procedure again. She explained the risks involved. She asked if they'd been pregnant before, asked their method of birth control, asked if they'd like information about adoption. She asked what made them decide to have abortions. Then the women waited some more.

Eventually, they were called back into a small corridor. Chairs lined the wall. They undressed and put on hospital gowns. They sat down with other patients, about half a dozen in all.

"No one talked the whole time until you were in that room;" Daphne recalls. "That's when you just start talking. You're already half-naked anyway."

The women began to share their stories: How far along they were, why they were having abortions.

"This one woman was married and had two kids," Daphne remembers. "And this other woman had four kids. There was one other girl my age."

Megan recalls a teen-age girl, frightened to death, and the smell of hospital cleaning solutions, "the prickly sensation on the soles of my bare feet from the cold floor, what I was wearing and the looks of mixed emotions on the faces of those women who shared that horrible day with me."

"And I felt weird," she recalls. She felt irresponsible, guilty, like she was doing the right thing, "but at the same time I felt like I was taking a shortcut and doing the easy thing."

Not for the first time, Daphne was having regrets.

"I was so close to leaving," she recalls. "Because I wasn't sure. I was probably 90 percent sure and 10 percent unsure. And that 10 percent was going through my head 10,000 miles a minute before I did it."

But Daphne did not leave. She went into the operating room and lay on a table with stirrups. She received the full intravenous anesthetic. She became unconscious, and the doctor terminated her pregnancy. Then they took her to the recovery room. When she returned to consciousness, she hurt.

Megan received a moderate intravenous anesthetic, which placed her in a "twilight" state. She seemed to float above the operation. She could hear the nurses talking. She felt a clamp-like sen-
sation. She heard the aspiration machine, a "horrendous sucking noise." And she hurt.

"It was very painful," Megan says bluntly. "This sounds really disgusting and harsh, but it felt like I had just attached a vacuum cleaner to my body and turned it on."

Afterwards, the emotions continued.

"It's a tailspin," Megan recalls. "You feel all emotions at once. You feel pain. You feel regret, maybe a little. You feel a tremendous sense of responsibility and relief that it's over."

No one, not even a doctor, will ever be able to tell they had abortions. The only ones who know are those who already knew. And anyone else the women told later.

The Other Side

On its paperwork, the Akron Women's Medical Group uses the term "pregnancy termination" to refer to abortion. Anti-abortion groups, like Right to Life, call abortion murder.

"It's killing," says Michelle Sawyer, executive director of Right to Life of Greater Akron. "And nobody should make the choice to kill. We don't even say pro-life or pro-choice. We say pro-life, pro-death. It's pro-life, pro-murder."

Sawyer's group provides information and assistance it hopes women will use to carry pregnancies to term. Most women who come to Right to Life considering abortions cite financial difficulties. Sawyer refers them to agencies that provide housing assistance or maternity clothes, baby food and other supplies. She gives them information about adoption agencies. She hands out pamphlets describing what her group sees as the horrors of abortion.

It was Right to Life that brought the Genocide Awareness Project to Kent State two years ago. The project was a circular mountain of posters depicting aborted fetuses. The display drew heated criticism, but Sawyer says it was not inappropriate because college students represent a "mature" audience.

Sawyer has no idea how many women her group has convinced to carry their pregnancies to term. But with billboards and county-fair displays and setups at college campuses, she can only hope that some women have heeded Right to Life's call.

Still, abortion is a legal medical procedure. So it makes Anderson especially mad when she gets calls from crazed pro-lifers — all men, she says. "Do you know you kill babies?" the anonymous callers snarl. Some threaten to kill Anderson.

"That's disgusting," Anderson says.

"My response to them is, 'Would you like to come and sit down and talk about it?' I haven't had anyone take me up on that."

Neither Sawyer nor her organization condones violence.

"Those are wacky individuals," she says. "Why would somebody be pro-life and go out and kill people?"

The Afterwards

A society-wide stigma insures many women who have abortions remain silent, Anderson says.

"Having an abortion is something we feel we're supposed to hide," Anderson says. "I think it's something women don't want to talk about. They want to forget. We are very good at that."

Megan never told her parents. She doesn't think she ever will. Megan's mother thinks abortion is murder. Her mother has voiced this opinions in front of her. Megan never said a thing.

Daphne told her mother the day before her abortion, in the midst of a family emergency — not involving either one — when emotions were high. But they never discussed it again.

Megan told a few close friends she was pregnant. Daphne told one. For the longest time afterwards, both were silent. But they had not forgotten. Real babies, babies on television, babies everywhere — all triggered memories of the abortion clinic. The same bumper sticker kept leaping out at Daphne: "Abortion=1 injured, 1 dead."

The memories of the abortion were prominent at first. Eventually they faded. But they haven't disappeared.

Daphne never wanted to talk about the abortion with her boyfriend. They lasted another four months together. The abortion did not hasten their breakup. Daphne has never dated anyone longer.

Megan tried to raise the subject after the initial weeks of silence, but her boyfriend became agitated. She says his mindset was "I messed up. I got my girlfriend pregnant. I took care of it. End of discussion."

They broke up in November 1999, five months after the abortion. Megan thinks the abortion prolonged the relationship. Had she not gotten pregnant, she muses, they would not have lasted much longer. But the abortion connected them.

"I think part of it was that he felt guilty still and wanted to continue to support me emotionally," Megan says.
This car, parked next to the Music and Speech Building and across from the Newman Center, displays a bumper sticker that reads, “Abortion stops a beating heart.”

The same bumper sticker kept leaping out at Daphne: **Abortion=1 injured, 1 dead.**

“And I think part of me was hanging onto him because I did invest a lot of emotional capital in him. We still went through that process together. We still went through the pain and the emotions, too.”

After the breakup, Megan was more comfortable discussing her abortion, often with people she thought she could help. She talked to friends of friends who became pregnant. She talked to women, even teen-agers, considering birth control. She talked to abortion critics. People Megan knew who were ardently anti-abortion gave pause upon discovering they actually knew someone who’d had one.

Megan doesn’t know that she actually changed anybody’s views. “But I have to think that they think about their choice of words and their concept of abortion differently now,” she says.

Daphne told only a handful of her friends about the abortion and only after more than six months had passed. She does not talk about it. But she has not forgotten.

“Part of her change of heart lies within her own family. When Daphne was pregnant, so was her cousin’s girlfriend. She carried her pregnancy to term. Her cousin and his girlfriend are now 19. They are still together. They both attend college. And Daphne’s family has accepted the baby with open arms.

“The baby’s completely fine, and they love it,” she says. “I get sad every Sunday because I see their baby. Their baby would be one month older than my baby. I think, ‘God, I could have a baby that was nine months.’”

Daphne still thinks abortion should be legal. For Megan, the experience did not just reaffirm her beliefs—it politicized her. The possibility abortion might ever be illegal again infuriates her. To hear some of the ultra-conservative rhetoric, Megan says, you’d think women who have abortions are vile criminals.

“I don't consider it murder in any way, shape or form,” Megan says. “I think that...”

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my choice was pro-life — my life."

If she had given birth, Megan muses, she might not have her college degree. Not have the dream job she found after graduation. Not have the option to move to whatever city her career or her desires take her.

Daphne knows she would be a different person had she given birth. But looking back, and looking at her cousin’s experience, she’s more and more confident she could have made things work.

“I’m always going to remember it, too. Even if I do get married and have kids,” Daphne says. “I’ll always think there’s one I didn’t have.”

Now Megan thinks more about the consequences her actions might have. The abortion changed her perspective on sex. She has told all her subsequent boyfriends about the abortion before she had sex with them.

“I really think about who I’m having sex with and if I really care about them,” she says. “If we’re going to have an intimate relationship, it’s something we should talk about.”

Both she and Daphne urge all women to consider what to do if they were to get pregnant, whom they can talk to. Because if a woman is not ready to decide what to do, they say, she’s not ready to be having sex.

“There are other people who go through this, and they are not crack whores or drug dealers’ girlfriends,” Megan says. “They’re normal, everyday girls who go to college, have jobs, pay their parking tickets. They just made a mistake. That’s what people think of when they think of people who have abortions. They don’t think of the girl who’s grown up next door to them.”

They don’t think of young women like Megan and Daphne. Young pregnant women anguish over something inside them — something some people call developing fetal tissue, something others call a human being with a soul.

Ohio law requires women who want an abortion call the clinic at least 24 hours in advance for an explanation of the purpose and nature of the surgery. The Akron Women’s Medical Group has a four-minute tape patients listen to over the phone after making appointments. Dr. Norman Matthews, the clinic’s medical director, tells the patient that the purpose of an abortion is to end pregnancy. He then tells her this is done by inserting a tube through the cervix (the opening of the womb) and into the uterus (the womb itself). The contents of the uterus are removed with suction and gentle scraping. Matthews reassures the patients this is a very safe procedure.

The most common complication is a tear that might occur in the uterus. There are two to four tears for every 1,000 abortions, Matthews says. The risk of death is 11 times higher should the pregnancy continue to term.

At the Saint Vincent Catholic Cemetery on Market Street in Akron, this memorial is dedicated to the thousands of fetuses aborted each year. The grave stone reads the following: “Baby unborn. In memory of all innocent victims of abortion. Our Lady of Guadalupe. Pray for us. Saint Vincent Holy Name Society.”
Some 5.5 million contract human papilloma virus each year. But most people don’t even know what it is.

Story by Mandy Jenkins
Illustration by Anthony Monday

A virus sleeps inside millions of Americans — and most of them do not even know they have it. It is believed to be the most common sexually transmitted disease in young Americans. It’s not syphilis, gonorrhea or HIV. Chances are, you have never heard of it.

Human papilloma virus, or HPV, comes in more than 100 strains, about 30 of which are transmitted sexually. According to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 20 million Americans are currently infected with HPV, and 5.5 million more are infected each year.

HPV can have no external symptoms, and those infected can go for weeks, months, years or even lifetimes without knowing they have it. In the age of AIDS, a disease like HPV may not seem like a big deal, but it can be life-threatening.

What it Feels Like for a Girl

Shelly, a Kent State senior who asked that her name be changed to protect her privacy, didn’t even know what HPV was when she went to her regular gynecologist appointment two years ago. As with most routine gynecological checkups, the doctor performed a Pap test, which takes a sample of cells from the tissue of the cervix to test for abnormalities.
It is believed to be the most common sexually transmitted disease in young Americans.
women, but they most likely do not know it.

Kissinger theorized the difference in the amount of change in genital cells between the sexes is because of differences in skin tissue.

"A woman’s genitalia is made up of different tissue than the shaft of the male penis," Kissinger explains. "The HPV virus is contracted through cracks in the skin. The female genital tissue is more prone to those cracks than the male’s, which is covered by tougher exterior skin."

D’Abreau says HPV is treatable, but it may not be completely eliminated. Genital warts can be treated with prescribed topical creams and medication, but depending on the size and location, lesions may need to be removed using more invasive means. One way to remove lesions is to use liquid nitrogen in cryotherapy to “freeze” off the warts.

Loop excision, or LEEP, cuts away the infected layers of tissue in the cervix with an electrical current. A third treatment method is laser surgery, which also removes the top layer of cervical tissue. Shelly decided on the latter method for her treatment. She says the painless and simple outpatient surgery removed the dysplasia from her cervix easily.

"I am such a big baby," she laughs. "There is no way I could have done the LEEP. Afterwards, I wasn’t allowed to use tampons, go swimming or have sex for six weeks."

There are many places around Kent where HPV can be diagnosed and treated. County health departments, free clinics, Planned Parenthood and the university health center all offer testing. DeWeese provides the prescription creams and oral medication, in addition to some cryogenic treatment. Planned Parenthood clinics offer the cream and chemical treatments. Private practice ob-gyn specialists are the only option for most surgeries.

HPV can recur even after the lesions have been removed. Last summer, not even two years following her first surgery, Shelly once again was diagnosed with dysplasia and had to have another laser surgery. She worries that the infection will keep recurring.

"So far they have burned off one part of my cervix and then repeated it again," she explains. "It sometimes worries me that my cervix will not be able to heal if I have to have surgery again. I don’t want all of this to prevent me from having children someday. That is my biggest worry: That my body will get to the point where it just can’t take anymore."

D’Abreau insists that people infected with HPV can still lead normal lives. "They can still get married and have children," he says. "Later on down the road, when they are involved in a monogamous relationship, they will have to make the decision to have unprotected sex and possibly expose their partner to the virus."

Living with an STD

Having HPV is difficult, Shelly says, because of the attitude that surrounds STDs.

"I would never come out and tell people I don’t know," she says. "The only people that know are those closest to me. If there was a girl sitting next to me telling me she had an STD and I didn’t... I can’t imagine how I’d think about it.

“It’s something people don’t talk about. I can’t explain why, but it is such a taboo. I guess it’s because most people would view you in a negative way if you say you have it."

For a long time after her diagnosis and treatment, Shelly also felt bad about having an STD.

"It kind of took me over for a while," she says. "But then I started doing my research on it. I spent a lot of time on the Internet reading up on what new findings are out there. My mom sends me whatever articles she can find about it. She’s very understanding, and we are both learning a lot."

Now Shelly has to see her gynecologist every three months to make sure the dysplasia is in check. She is finally comfortable in her own skin and understands the nature of the virus that currently lies dormant within her.

"I eventually came to realize it could happen to anybody, and it is not who I am. It is a part of me but not who I am."
adam gibbs searches for love on the internet
I nodded and responded: “Hey.”

The Internet has made a big impact on dating, with more people using it to find love. LoveAOL, America Online’s forum for Internet dating, has more than 220,000 searching singles, and roughly 1,200 weddings have been performed as a result of the service, according to the Web site. And that’s not the only popular dating Web site. More than 21,000 people are listed at singlesonline.com. There is also dating.com, Yahoo! Personals, friendfinder.com, adultfriendfinder.com and match.com, all of which cater to overlapping segments of society.

So, I decided to test these waters myself to find out what’s out there.

<the search>

The hunt began when I logged onto collegeclub.com, a Web site designed for college students. I didn’t put up a personal ad right away. I decided to shop around first. After viewing some of the profiles, I concluded people should post photographs if they want to be noticed. An attractive girl who lived in Akron posted one ad. She wanted an attractive, energetic guy with a caring personality who could act as a father to her two children. She was 19. Two kids at that age? Good luck, lady.

I set up a personal ad for myself. It asked me various questions: age (20), ethnicity (Caucasian), Zodiac sign (Sagittarius), hair color (Brown) and eye color (Hazel). My criteria for potential dates were not too specific: attractive, easy-going, smart. And she had to be fun. Finally, I uploaded a headshot of myself and hoped for the best.

There it was: My personal information and photograph for the entire world to see. I sat back and waited a couple days for the replies to fill my e-mail account. It didn’t take long for me to
read them all because there weren't any. Not a single person replied.

A feeling of rejection came over me, but it wasn't a different type of rejection. It wasn't as embarrassing as being shot down at the bar, and it certainly wasn't as painful.

Not to be discouraged, I logged onto friendfinder.com, adultfriendfinder.com, match.com and Yahoo! Personals to set up personal ads.

I surfed through hundreds of ads. One was from a girl in Cincinnati. She had four pictures that demonstrated a simple truth: The woman was a goddess. A prototype for every model in a Victoria's Secret catalog.

Then I read her profile: "I know I am beautiful, don't blame me, blame my parents!" Hmm, somebody had an ego problem, not to mention bad grammar. I read her profile, and her last words told me everything I needed to know: "STD free and tested regularly." What kind of lifestyle was she leading?

Adultfriendfinder.com is not the place to go if you just want a date. The homepage proudly proclaims the site is the "World's Largest Sex Personals." They aren't kidding. The site gives you exactly what you want — whatever that may be. The search engine is designed to look for people to engage in erotic e-mail, discrete relationships, group sex, bondage, cross-dressing, sadism and masochism.

The world of sex knows no bounds, and everything outside of pedophilia can be found in the personal ads on this Web site. A 70-year-old couple was searching for some newlyweds to engage in bondage. One man proclaimed that he liked to pretend he was an infant during sex. From the bizarre to the downright disgusting, the site had something for anybody who ever had any type of sexual fetish.

Not having any sexual fetishes, I moved on.

Days went by; I didn't get a single response to any of my personal ads, and no one answered the replies I sent.

Finally, I caught a break. I set up a profile at dating.com and completed an exhaustive search of everyone within a 50-mile radius of Kent. Dating.com receives about two million hits per day and has about 200,000 active members. The first day, I got three responses. Five, the next day. After about five days, I had received 14 responses.

The women who replied to my ad were — for the most part — attractive. Their ages ranged from 18 to 28. I was hoping for someone close to my age, but I wrote back to all of them, and most of them replied to my letter.
Things were going well until an inevitable problem arose. At some point, I had to tell them I was going to publish the details of our date. Suddenly, the responses dwindled to five, then three, then one. There was one girl brave enough to be the subject of my article.

She was

<the girl>
Her name was Hillary Howell, a junior psychology major at Kent State University. According to her profile, she considered herself “very outgoing but shy at first.” She said she was honest, dependable and a great companion. Hillary’s profile said she was looking for a man who is honest, caring, mature, supportive and responsible but still knew how to have fun. She said she wanted a man who could goof around but be serious too.

It sounded simple enough. We wrote several e-mails back and forth. She asked about my summer, my job, my classes and my goals after graduation. Not wanting to get too personal and scare her away, I asked her the same questions. She seemed very outgoing. Her e-mails were loaded with smiley faces and acronyms like “LOL,” which means, “laughing out loud.”

Wendee Mason, founder of Date Smart Workshops (www.datesmartingles.com), said no matter how many personal ads are online, e-mails should be kept to a minimum.

“No more than four e-mails are necessary to decide if you are a match,” Mason said. Mason teaches that the first e-mail lists your “non-negotiables,” things individuals must have in a relationship. Things like whether the person wants kids, smokes or uses drugs. After receiving the person’s response, the second e-mail lists character traits a person must have. The character traits you desire should be based on your moral values, Mason said.

“If the other person matches those things after a total of four e-mails,” Mason said, “then go ahead and meet.”

Like the average person, I was not familiar with Mason’s strategies when I placed an online personal ad. I jumped into online dating with both feet. I did have fears of being told brutal lies, and fears of whom I might meet floated through my mind.

After corresponding through e-mails for just five days, Hillary gave me her phone number and told me to call her.

The first phone call is probably the most important aspect of the online dating experience. An e-mail can make anybody look good, but how a person actually sounds when you are talking to
them can really tell you something.
She seemed shy at first, just like her profile said. The conversation started slowly. Both of us were just trying to size each other up. I think she was trying to determine if I was the next Jeffrey Dahmer, and I was wondering why she was not deterred by the fact this was all going to be published. It was just your usual chitchat, and then we discussed our favorite things. Favorite movies. Favorite restaurants. Favorite books. We talked for about two hours.

As the conversation died down, I summoned my courage and asked if she would like to go out on Sunday night.

She said yes.

<the date>

I started to get ready for my date about an hour before she was going to pick me up. After showering, shaving, putting gel in my hair and ironing a shirt, I sat on the couch in my apartment, waiting for 7 p.m. I peered out my Venetian blinds every other minute, hoping to catch a glance of her walking into my building. I could see how picking me up would make her feel at ease.

She knocked at the door and we greeted each other. We didn't say much. We just walked to her car — a brand new Chevy Cavalier Z24.

The car was a good icebreaker because it provided me with ample opportunities to toss out some compliments — always a good strategy as long as it's not overdone.

As we drove down state Route 261, I noticed she was doing most of the talking. That was fine with me because I had just realized my wallet contained $5, which would not be enough to cover the date. I had my parents' Visa card, which I could use only in case of an emergency. I thought this would qualify as an emergency.

We went to Action Billiards in
Tallmadge and played pool. The pool hall was a good place to go for a first date. We were engaging in some physical activity, and conversation was possible. The dim lighting was intimate, and the cigarette smoke permeating the air set a mysterious and erotic mood.

Granted, it wasn't the classiest of places and neither of us was a skilled player, but we still managed to have fun.

Next, we went to one of my favorite restaurants, Applebee's. She wasn't hungry and got a glass of water. I ate a burger with onion peels.

The conversation flowed more freely. We had both loosened up a bit. We talked about her dog, talked about her job and shared stories about our past college roommates. At one point, she said she was surprised because she wasn't as nervous as she had expected.

After eating, we went to the waterfall in downtown Kent. We sat on the bench and the conversation flowed. The tension was gone and I thought the romantic atmosphere of the moonlight bouncing off the waterfall would be a good place to sneak a kiss. The opportunity never arose.

I wasn't getting a "green light" from her, and I didn't know if she kissed on the first date.

She dropped me off at my apartment. The date lasted five hours. I gave her a kiss on the cheek and said I would call her, which I did.

I thought the date went very well. Online dating is simply a new way of meeting someone. Any image of you can be projected on that person's computer screen, but when you meet in person, it's just like a regular first date. There's tension and uncomfortable gaps in conversation and you can't proofread your dialogue as you can an e-mail. But I thought the online dating process was worth it because I did enjoy myself.

As for Hillary and I, we do plan to go out again. Will we have a romantic connection? Just like after any other first date, it's too early to tell.

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Carrie Konyha doesn't run a typical classroom. There are no desks, and a dry-erase easel with large tarot cards taped to the surface stands in place of a chalkboard. A woman, armed with a notebook and a deck of tarot cards, talks about how her children's friends think she's a witch because she attends this class. A Kent State pre-med student sits exhausted on a large beige couch in the living room. A man in his 50s, who believes he was part of an ancient Celtic tribe in his past life, talks to a woman who has been reading tarot cards for 22 years about her experiences and abilities.

About 7:30 p.m., a woman in hospital scrubs breezes up the stairs and takes a seat in a chair. She keeps her tarot cards in a small velvet pouch. She says the bag helps her connect with the deck, making it easier to learn how to read the cards.

An artificial waterfall, illuminated by a bright light, greets guests, as does the heady smell of incense. Everything is neat and orderly, from the shelves filled with candles and books to the perfectly arranged spices in the kitchen.
In the middle of the living room, Konyha, a petite, trim 33-year-old with long, dark, curly hair and striking green eyes, is perched on a chair. A wide smile is on her face, welcoming her students into her home and her place of business.

Konyha offers spiritual guidance, psychic readings, tarot-card instruction and belly-dancing classes to a large clientele from Kent and the surrounding areas.

Konyha, who was born in Akron, considers her unconventional occupation a way to "help people help themselves."

"This is seen as a normal part of life in my family," she said. "A lot of people on my mother's side are very intuitive. I come from a long line of musicians, artists and dancers, and any time you have a lot of creative energy, you're going to explore the more intuitive side of things as well."

Konyha said she's been aware of her psychic abilities since childhood. At that time, she assumed everybody had the same feelings and intuitions.

"I just figured everybody felt the same things I did," she said. "But being around other kids and talking to them, I then realized I was different. I also think that because of my sensitivities to my surroundings, I was very shy in school. I didn't have a lot of friends."

Konyha described a psychic as somebody who has the ability to detect non-physical energies. She said although most people have the ability to tap into the surface of their subconscious mind, a professional psychic has extra sensitivity to these energies and can interpret how they may affect others.

"Sometimes I see things through my mind's eye, and sometimes I physically or emotionally feel things," she said. "At times, I literally hear in my head what I'm supposed to say, and sometimes it's like a wave, a sense of knowingness that overcomes me."

Konyha said her clairvoyant abilities are part of who she is, as well as an integral part of her family, which considers her psychic abilities nothing out of the ordinary. In fact, her grandfather nurtured her abilities by passing down some of his own psychic wisdom.

Her grandfather, a Hungarian gypsy, taught her how to use a pendulum when she was 10. A pendulum is a weighted object attached to a string that swings back and forth or side to side. The movements of the pendulum are the key to the information you are seeking, Konyha said.

In Konyha's case, her grandfather made a pendulum out of her stepmother's wedding ring. By holding it over her stepmother's pregnant stomach, he was able to determine by the back and forth movements she would have a boy.

"You already know the answers to most of your questions," she said. "A pendulum helps your subconscious mind send an electrical signal to a realm where you are able to understand the answer to the question."

Despite her familial background in the unexplained, Konyha decided to broaden her knowledge by going to school. She received an associate's degree from the College of Metaphysical Studies in Clearwater, Fla. There she enhanced her skills in tarot readings and took basic courses in the metaphysics and spiritual healing, which she now incorporates into her dance classes as a form of meditation and therapy.

"I've always had a love of dancing," she said. "My grandmother was an acrobat in Barnum and Bailey's Circus. There's also a lot of spirituality involved with belly dancing — it's the world's oldest dance. Plus, I like the whole girl power aspect of it as well."

For the past decade, Konyha has focused on the spiritual healing aspects of belly dancing. Concentrating on rhythm, breathing control and mind therapy through dance movement helps her students discover important parts of their inner selves, Konyha said.

"My love for Middle-Eastern dance stems from the fact that it has been used by women of all shapes and sizes as a medium for prayer, meditation, holistic healing, personal empowerment and the celebration of life for many thousands of years," she said.

Jennifer Gordon, a student in Konyha's belly-dancing class, agreed with the positive effects associated with belly dancing.

"It makes you feel really good about being a chick," she said. "You have confidence in yourself."

Konyha is also a certified psychic, a title reserved for members of the American Association of Professional Psychics. This organization is registered with the government, which means its members must adhere to a strict set of ethical rules and codes, like setting reasonable fees, keeping sessions confidential and avoiding fraudulent practices.

"I had to go through a lot of different things," she said. "It's not like you just send in your $5, and you get a certificate. Getting certified was more like a process of evaluation and testing you have to go through until they deem you're an authentic psychic."

Konyha said she needed four letters of recommendation from clients attesting to her psychic abilities, and she had to give phone readings to three people on the certification committee. She also
had to write a 150-word essay explaining her training and interests in the psychic field.

According to the American Association of Professional Psychics' Web site (www.certifiedpsychics.com), prospective members are required to work as professional psychics for at least a year before they can be considered for certification.

Konyha said her ethical values always factor into her work. She follows the code of conduct set forth by the association.

"I don't believe in prying psychically," she said. "When a client comes to me and I give them a psychic reading, I'm not consciously reading their mind — it's more like I get messages from God that I tell people. It's no different than what the Bible calls spiritual gifts. It's just different terminology."

Konyha said the ethical gap between psychic reading and fortune telling is important. She is quick to point out she isn't, by any means, going to look into a crystal ball and tell you the winning numbers to the lottery.

"Telling what I see in the future is a part of what I do," she said. "But fortune telling is a parlor game — something you do for fun. It's meaningless. I tell people where they're at right now psychically by focusing on their past and how they got to be in the state of mind they're in right now.

"Then I'm able to determine what is most likely going to occur for them based on where they're at right now — it's up to the individual to decide where they want to go in their life. If you don't want to go in that direction, fine, then you have it in your power to do something to pull yourself away from that direction."

Gordon first saw her instructor on Channel 25/29, a television station in Akron where Konyha performed on-air readings for two years. After receiving a few psychic readings from her, Gordon said she was convinced that Konyha was a genuine psychic.

"Carrie is very accurate," said Gordon. "Her readings are down-to-earth, and she doesn't leave any open-ended questions — everything I wanted to know she covered."

Pam Zepp, Konyha's business partner and roommate, said she knew they were going to be good friends the moment they met. Zepp had gone to Konyha for a psychic reading. She had recently moved from New Jersey to Kent, but with few family members and friends in the area, she knew there had to be another reason she was here.

"When I met Carrie, we instantly clicked," she said. "I believe in living in harmony with nature's cycles, and what we do gives us a framework to put our spiritual beliefs into."

Zepp has been doing psychic readings for 12 years and has studied the tarot for more than 15 years. Like Konyha, Zepp believes in focusing on the present during a psychic reading and focusing on solutions.

"You have to be receptive to people's needs," she said. "I try to get people to
look at the layer underneath. We believe in helping people help themselves by getting them to look at their life in a productive way."

Both women regularly attend The Vineyard church. Because of their faith in God, there are certain aspects of the supernatural they don’t meddle with.

"With Ouija boards, you don’t know what you’re dealing with," Zepp said. "It’s the same with spells and curses. Spells and curses definitely work. You don’t need candles, herbs and stones to perform these spells. I believe that whatever you receive through these means is at the expense of someone else."

Aside from regularly giving psychic readings, Konyha also teaches tarot-card reading and performs private readings.

Kecia Pink, a sophomore pre-med major, said she has studied tarot cards since she was 14. She decided to take Konyha’s tarot-reading class so she can read her own tarot cards.

"Most psychics don’t want to teach you their secrets," she said. "But Carrie wants you to be able to read your own cards."

Pink said many psychics are only concerned with taking your money. She has visited other psychics before, but Konyha was the only person she felt comfortable taking tarot-instruction classes from.

"I respect her as a psychic person, and I’m glad she is willing to teach me how to read tarot cards."

Konyha has been reading tarot cards for 18 years. Despite her extensive background, she said there are many secrets to the cards she still doesn’t understand.

"You can never fully comprehend the tarot," she said. "There is always something you can learn from them."

As a whole, Konyha said, tarot cards reflect the entire human experience. She describes a tarot reading as being similar to a map — the placement of the cards reflect what kind of path a person can follow, as well as the path he or she is following at the moment.

"Any experience you have or will have in your lifetime, there is going to be a card for it," she said. "It isn’t a random process. You always have your own answers — you just have to access the knowledge of the tarot in your own subconscious mind."

During the first sessions of a tarot class, Konyha explains the significance of the cards, which are grouped into two categories: 22 major arcana cards, which deal with the personal soul, and 56 minor arcana cards that represent daily life and reveal how one perceives life in a general sense, such as how they react to certain events and people close to them.

Konyha said learning the tarot can be a long and complicated process, but with a little practice, anyone can become a reader.

"You should do different things to familiarize yourself with your cards," she said. "I keep a crystal on top of mine to neutralize my cards from other people’s energy after I do a reading, and I also rubbed some amber resin on the sides for a personal touch. The more comfortable you are with your cards, the easier it will be to learn the tarot."

Konyha doesn’t advertise any of her services. Unlike most psychics, she doesn’t need to rely on new business to make ends meet. In addition to her television show, Konyha had a weekly radio show on WNIR. She also has business cards at Earth Tones, which attract many clients.

During her TV show, "Psychic Talk," she would give mini-psychic readings to people who called in and asked for advice. She also gave tarot readings on the air, sometimes for as long as five hours each week.

"I’ve definitely proven myself and my abilities by doing live readings on the radio and TV," she said.

Gordon agrees. She said she was amazed the first time she went to Konyha for a psychic reading.

"She’s genuine and she’s down-to-earth," she said. "She doesn’t try to be psychic — she’s not vague and mysterious with her answers. Besides, I don’t think I would have gone back for other readings if I didn’t trust her initially."

Konyha said although she performs psychic readings to the best of her abilities, she doesn’t guarantee 100 percent accuracy.

"Nobody is perfect, and nobody has all the answers except God," she said. "We ultimately choose the path we are to follow, and it is up to the individual to choose the life that is best for them — that is why God gave us free will."
Edward W. Crosby, founder of the Ida B. Wells Community Academy in Akron, started the charter school to give a choice to parents who are unhappy with the public school system but can’t afford a private school.
Maxine Burris (right) holds classmate Haven Faupel’s hand as they head back inside after recess. While the student body at the Ida B. Wells Community Academy is predominantly African American, there are a few white students and faculty members. Crosby says he hopes the school will diversify.

Away from the diesel-scented highway, past a stretch of run-down mini-marts, a quaint little church sits on a leafy west-Akron hilltop. Chirping birds and quiet winds displace the typical urban soundscape for daydream-esque moments. The early morning sun reflects off freshly painted Victorian homes on perpendicular streets. It is here, in the back of the Antioch Baptist Church on Wooster Road, that Edward W. Crosby’s dream is tangible.

“I don’t know, sometimes you wake up in the morning and the dreams you had that night lead you to do things that you later wonder why you got into,” Crosby says, sitting comfortably in his living room in an armless chair. His dream was to found an academy to take children beyond the bounds of public education. His dream became the Ida B. Wells Academy. “The purpose of community schools is not to emulate and copy what has already been established, but to change it,” Crosby says. “Not to change it for change’s sake, but to change it to make it better.”

In 1994, Congress passed the Improving America’s Schools Act, allowing states to create charter school laws at their discretion. Ohio adopted legislation for charter schools in 1997 but calls them community schools.

Crosby, an emeritus professor of Pan-African studies and Germanic and Slavic languages and literature, founded the academy in 1999. Charter schools are non-sectarian, publicly funded schools designed to provide educational alternatives for students. Crosby’s school caters to students whose parents feel public schools have failed to provide an adequate education. At the Ida B. Wells Community Academy, each child is taught at
Simone Robinson (front right), 6, is eager to give the correct answer in Molly McCrea's language arts class, where students sound out words written on the chalkboard.

Aaron Wright, 9, listens to Principal Perkins Pringle read Lost in the Tunnel of Time in his language arts class.

In Principal Pringle's language arts class, which includes about 10 children, students learn about influential historical figures, including Harriet Tubman. In front of the class Shamari Grant, 9, reads a paper describing what Harriet Tubman means to her.

a level suitable to his or her own abilities. The traditional correlation between age and grade is ignored to ensure that every student is learning.

Smaller class sizes and flexible administration are supposed to foster room for educational innovation. Although funded by the state or an eligible school district, charter schools are free from many of the regulations pertaining to districts. Still, they are charged with achieving the same academic standards as public schools.

Crosby has founded academic institutions in the past. In 1969, he founded the Institute of African American Affairs at Kent State. In 1976, the institute became the department of Pan-African Studies.

"After having taught at Kent State for 25 years, I retired," he says contemplatively. "But then I had a dream, and I woke up, and here I was going to teach elementary kids, something which I had no experience with. But I knew that some things had to change at whatever level.

"When they got to [college] age, minds had already been set, and if those minds hadn't been set correctly in the first instance, then they're not going to be set straight in the later instances."

Plans for the academy began in 1998, when Crosby attended a meeting with Jean Calhoun, a Cleveland school-reform activist, and local parents disenchanted with the public school system. Crosby told the group they were taking the wrong approach by trying to change the existing school systems. He suggested they start their own school, which was now possible under Ohio's new charter school law.

"When you have a monopoly on the educational process, then you don't care what happens with a kid," Crosby says. "You lose this one, there's another one coming."

"When choice enters the question, you have to be more careful on how you get students."
After the meeting and an information-gathering trip to Columbus, he began drafting a charter proposal and presented it to the state. That year, he also brought Perkins Pringle, a former student in his black educational development class, into the planning.

"He said to me that one of the things that he would like to do is start his own school," Crosby recalls. "Perkins was one of the few students I had that, when I would suggest a book to read, would actually go and read it. I like that academic curiosity."

On May 4, 1999, the proposal was accepted and a five-year charter was awarded to the Ida B. Wells Community Academy, a school named in honor of the black journalist, early equal rights advocate and founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Crosby chose to name the school after her because buildings are rarely named after African American women.

The Warriors of Nia

Pringle's enthusiasm for his position as principal never waivers. Although he's young for a principal, only 28 years old, he has a clear idea of what he is doing with the school.

As he sits at one of the school's cafeteria tables, he explains that the small class sizes his school offers are a key attraction to parents, who do not have to pay tuition but must choose to send their children there. With a total of 90 students, each class averages 18 pupils.

Pringle also says teachers need to recognize who the students are and teach them accordingly.

"The dialogue must reflect who you have at your school," he says, then turns, delicately settling a touching-feet dispute between two children at the other end of the table. Wearing thin glasses and a trim beard, he is everywhere at once — strict, but mellow in his approach to the students. He makes it clear to them why they are being reprimanded and offers alternate, more appropriate ways of doing things.

"This place has a leader and he is in charge," Wilma Woods, the school's special-education teacher, says.

Pringle urges the teachers to incorporate their heritages into the curriculum, his own African roots already firmly established in the school. Kiswahili words are used to shorten behavioral philosophies, like creativity (kuumba) and collective work and responsibility (ujima). The rules and philosophy of the school rely heavily on these standards of conduct. The Kiswahili words summarize these principles in simple, easy-to-remember terms. They also familiarize the largely African American student body with their cultural heritage.

Today, the students in his fourth-grade class, who call themselves the Warriors of Nia (purpose), are drawing on African heritage to construct tono games. Tono is a traditional African game of strategy. The students construct the boards with egg cartons and cardboard. Younger students are assigned to collect acorns to be used as game pieces. When everything is together, the fourth graders must distribute the games to each class in the school and teach the younger students how to play the game.

"They're open to games, you know," Pringle says, citing his graduate teaching studies on constructivism, a teaching method that stresses connecting with the kids on their level. "The problem must be relevant to the students."

The Superstar of the Week

Ida Symonette and Molly McCrea start the day by getting the students in their first-grade class to settle down. The class has chosen to be called the Creative Thinkers, a title clearly indicated in the hall outside the room on a logo of a large light bulb.

"Today is Friday, Sept. 14, 2001," the class recites, dry and inattentive. McCrea, a first-year teacher, thinks they can do better. She urges them to put forth more effort.

"TODAY IS FRIDAY, SEPT. 14, 2001," they howl in giggly unison.

Being Friday, the "superstar of the week" gets to show off a toy to the rest of the class. A new student is selected every week to be the brief focus on Friday mornings.

This week's superstar is Simone Robinson. She has brought a purple, remote-controlled Barbie car.

"My dad got it for me for Christmas," she tells the class modestly, holding back a smile.

At the car's first movement, children pop out of their seats to get closer. For the first time this morning, the teaching tandem gives in to the children's excitement and allows for momentary chaos.

While McCrea is inside beginning the
lesson, Symonette stands in the dim hallway talking excitedly about her job.

After years teaching high school in inner-city Cleveland, she had given up.

"I had 16 year olds with three kids who couldn’t read," she says, still in disbelief. "What are they going to teach their kids? Nothing. They couldn’t even spell their kids’ names; they would just write a bunch of letters."

Symonette quit teaching, moved to Akron and decided to concentrate more on her own son’s upbringing. But when she heard about the academy, she was quick to jump on board.

"I liked what this school does with the age groupings,” she says, pausing to corral some stray boys. "If a kid doesn’t know how to read in the fourth grade, then what?"

Each day begins with the children in their age groups — kindergarten, first grade and so on. At this school they are designated by KiswaHili numbers. Kindergarten is moja, which means one; McCrea’s class, is mbili, or two.

In these age sets, they participate in non-competitive, yet educational activities with their peers. Later in the day, the students are reorganized into groups that suit their academic abilities, with no regard for age, to learn language arts, history and math.

The Popping Neck

In the special education room, which doubles as the computer lab, Wilma Woods works with Santwain Hammond.

Santwain is between first and second grade. He is filling in missing consonants on a ditto sheet. He moves constantly. The noise his shiny pants make as he twists in his seat becomes grating. His feet, in new shoes, bounce nonstop. His body wiggles like a broken rubber band.

Halfway down the sheet Santwain is stuck. He works with “Le on.” The picture above the word looks suspiciously like an orange, he says.

“That’s a lemon,” Woods tells him. “Sometimes I like to squeeze a lemon into my tea.”

Santwain agrees. His grandma does the same, come to think of it.

"Or sometimes you put it on baked fish," Woods continues.

“Eeeewwww. My people don’t like fish. They’re nasty,” he says, utterly repulsed. He starts talking about the time his dad made him eat fish. Woods tries to get him back on track.

When he finishes the paper he cracks his knuckles, placing a note of finality on his latest academic triumph.

“Do you know all my fingers can pop? And my pinky? And my neck?” he asks in his low, raspy voice, twisting his head to produce a series of painful-sounding clicks and pops.

Story time is next. Woods holds the book open and reads to Santwain. He wiggles out of his chair in an effort to get a closer look at a mouse hunting for Easter eggs. Now entirely on top of his desk, he reaches out for Woods’ desk and pulls himself and his desk closer. Woods makes him count and describe shapes on the pages. The two point at the pages together, their hands about the same size, conducting a thorough search for all red circles, blue squares and Easter eggs.

Santwain notices a jar of pasta in one illustration. He drops the shape count and reflects upon the last pasta dinner his mother made.

"Sometimes we go on tangents," Woods says calmly.

When Santwain’s time is up, he politely says goodbye and heads back to his regular class. Woods says he was very obstinate the first time they met. He said he did not like her and was hesitant to go off alone with a new face. This was a minor challenge to the teacher who tells of student assaults on faculty members in the West Palm Beach, Fla., schools where she used to teach. By the third week of school, Santwain’s attitude and trust had improved so that language arts can take over as the focus of his visits with Woods.

Three girls are the next to visit. They are in the fourth grade and are here to work on their organizational skills. On the chalkboard is their detailed lesson plan, which they copy and take home for their parents to sign. Next, they put their ditto sheets in numerical order.

Woods goes into a lesson on diacritical markings in hot anticipation of the soon-to-arrive dictionaries. She is amped on teaching the “old-fashioned phonic method.”

"Dictionaries are great," she tells the girls. "You can learn things from a dictionary even when you’re in college."

Shanice Knox is more interested in the lunch being served outside the room than in breves and macrons.
"I need to eat so I don't fall asleep," Knox says, lifting her head, letting her pencil roll off her desk for the umpteenth time in the session.

The Grasshoppers

The Grasshoppers, a.k.a. the kindergartners, are finishing a chicken-nugget lunch and cleaning up before recess.

Ti Badejo, a graduate student in liberal studies at Kent State, is the school's disciplinarian and assistant to the principal. He monitors the progress of the cleanup.

One little boy wipes up his spot while repeating "ujima, ujima," under his breath. Students at the school are constantly reminded of this concept and are expected to practice it.

"Ago," Badejo calls out to the group, seeking their attention. "Ame," they recite back, signaling he has it.

It's time to select a line leader for their walk down the hill to the playground for recess.

Badejo scans the wiggly but quiet group.

"I like your smile," he says to the youngster who had just been reminding himself to practice ujima. "You be the leader today."

This Grasshopper is delighted.

Badejo started his involvement with the school as an intern but later found a permanent position as the school's disciplinarian. When students become a distraction to their class or are not completing any of their work, it is Badejo's job to work one-on-one with them.

Badejo first heard about the school when Crosby spoke at a Black United Students meeting last spring, while Badejo was still an undergraduate in Pan-African Studies. At the meeting, Crosby told the audience that they had to go out and create their own jobs rather than relying on others to fruitfully employ them. He offered the school that he and Pringle started as an example.

While Badejo was interning at the school, he noticed the need for a full-time disciplinarian to make sure everyone was learning. Badejo had participated in tutoring and mentor programs but never envisioned himself teaching. Social work was more his thing, but he wanted to work with children.

"I'm more of a life-skills oriented person," he says. "I like to make sure the kid can sit in class and let the teachers teach them."

He looks worn out, but in about an hour he will head back to Kent State to attend evening classes. After the little boy has been picked up, Badejo and first-grader India Pringle, the principal's daughter, tidy the chairs in the cafeteria while Miles Davis' "Kind of Blue" plays softly.

There are plans to expand the academy next August with schools in north and east Akron. Although the current school is funded by the state, the new ones will be funded by Lucas County. The county, which surrounds Toledo, has a special program that funds charter schools, not only in its own county but throughout Ohio. In effect, the three schools of the Ida B. Wells Community Academy will have two funding sources but only one management source.

Crosby acknowledges this has the potential to be a "logistical headache."

Which schools will host what grades is unclear, Crosby says. But fifth grade starts next year and sixth the year after that. If the charter is renewed in two years, he says he would like the school to propose a new charter to expand to ninth grade.

"I am unwilling to say that we have produced some students here and then turn them over to the public schools again," he says. "I'm just unwilling to deal with that."
Adam Glenn sees dead people

"I want to do what Uncle Sam does when I grow up," Adam Glenn always said when he was young.

"It was just something that fascinated him," says Nancy Yanito, his mother. "For the special person that he is, I think it's wonderful. Adam is a real people person, and those that know him know that it is a great place for him to be."

Of course, no one quite knows how Glenn's clients feel. They're dead.

When he was 7, Glenn discovered his favorite uncle was a funeral director. He wasn't quite sure what that meant at the time, but he knew he had to do it. Uncle Sam did it.

"He and his brother stayed with me when I did an internship at that funeral home," Sam Glenn says. "I took them for a tour, and we had a couple of bodies downstairs, but he didn't seem too upset. As time went on, he made comments about wanting to do this."

Fourteen years later, Glenn is learning firsthand what his dream job is all about at the Redmon Funeral Home in Stow.

Glenn has worked there for more than two years, while attending Kent State to complete the 60 credit hours of liberal education requirements needed to get into the Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science. He will spend a total of 2 1/2 years at Kent State and then 15 months in Cincinnati.

"Basically, I do anything from washing the cars to mowing the lawn," he says. "I drive the hearse for funerals, work the parking lot and am on call Mondays and Wednesdays, then every other weekend."

When the phone rings in the middle of the night, Glenn must shake himself out of a deep sleep and put on a nice button-down shirt, pants and dress shoes. Then, with the funeral home's van, he goes to the hospital, home or morgue to get the body. It's always the same routine: go in with the cot, pick up the body, do the paperwork, return to the funeral home. Some nights he is able to sleep soundly. Others he may get two or three calls.

"You think, 'Man, I know what that is.' But you just do it. There's good and bad stuff to the job. It's not really that bad. I don't mind it."

Glenn says he's always been comfortable with the idea of death. In fact, he doesn't even remember the first time he had to deal with a body.

"That was over two years ago," he
No one quite knows how Glenn's clients feel. They're dead.

Right: Kent State student Adam Glenn of Stow has wanted to be a funeral director since age 7. After graduating from Kent State, he will attend the Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science for 15 months to get funeral director and embalmer licenses.

Above: Glenn cleans off a casket in the casket-selection room at Redmon Funeral Home in Stow as part of his weekly duties, most of which involve maintenance of the facility.

says. "If I had done it only two or three times, I'd remember, but I've done this hundreds of times."

The only time the job gets to Glenn is when he's faced with the deaths of young people or parents who leave children behind.

"I just don't look at anybody, try not to make eye contact," he says about the pickups.

During calling hours, however, Glenn offers guidance and support for the families.

Though he sees death daily, Glenn is not afraid.

"Am I scared of dying? No, not at all. I never have been. It's a lot of people's biggest fear but not mine," he says.

While working at Redmon, Glenn has also been able to observe and learn things he otherwise would not have experienced until mortuary school, like embalmings.

"I got sick to my stomach," Glenn says of the first time he saw an embalming. "I had to go outside to catch my breath. After I got a breath of fresh air, I was fine.

"Part of the process made me sick. I figure it's just normal, of course, when you see something like that, especially when you start thinking about your lunch or something," he says.

What Glenn encounters on a daily basis may seem odd, and the fact that he wants to do this for a living may seem even more bizarre.

Off the job, however, he looks like any other Kent State student — relaxed in jeans and a T-shirt. He even has a tattoo.

Class introductions often come with strange looks.

"I'd say, 'Yes, I work for a funeral home and want to be a funeral director.' Then my classmate will say, 'This is Adam. He's a weirdo.'

"But, I'm not embarrassed by it or anything. I like it because every day is different."

Some days he works maintenance; others he's in a suit and tie on his way to a doctor's office or the health department.

Though every workday involves things that are far from appealing to most students, Glenn says a cubical prison isn't for him.

"Why would anyone want to do that? It would drive me crazy. I just can't sit still for a long period of time."

After concluding his 3½ years at Kent State and the mortuary college, Glenn hopes to complete his apprenticeship and then receive licenses to practice as a funeral director and embalmer. He then wants to return to Stow and continue working at Redmon.

Glenn seems to have found his calling in those early morning body calls.

"We'll find out, won't we?" he says.
LIVING THE HIGH LIFE

A student opens up about his days dealing pot

Story by Phil Novak

Photo Illustration by Allison Waltz
Jay, a 21-year-old Kent State student, is a member of a national honor society, has a high grade-point average, works on campus and likes to hang out with his friends, watch movies and go to parties.

In his spare time, he also sells pot.

Photo Illustration by Glenn Luther
don’t really know how I got started,” he says. “I just got myself a little bit of quantity, and I wanted to smoke for free, basically. And I figured if I can get a couple of my friends who smoke with me, if they want a bag, I’ll just give it to them for a little more than I pay. They get a good deal, and I’m smoking for free.”

The smell of incense intensifies as we walk toward the living room, but the mild odor of burnt marijuana grabs my attention. Two people, a man and a woman, are sitting on the couch, their eyes glued to the television. They say “hi,” then turn around and begin to stare at the television again.

Jay, who asked that his name and those of his friends be changed because of the nature of their activities, picks up his dog, Mario, and looks him in the face. “He only smokes KB,” Jay says, referring to a potent form of marijuana known as Kine Bud. “Why don’t you sit down here, and we’ll do this.” He points to a small bar in the room adjacent the living room. Several 1920s-style marijuana propaganda posters hang on the blue, sloppily painted walls. Jay takes a seat behind the bar. A poster of a man grinning and holding a joint hangs behind him with the caption, “Marijuana: Hey, at least it’s not crack!”

“So what do you want to know?” he asks, grinning, his eyes glazed over. Slightly purple circles lie beneath his eyes, his face is dead pale and his moppy, frizzy brown hair is scattered about. I tell him I want to know about selling marijuana, and his smile widens.

“He only smokes KB,” Jay says, referring to a potent form of marijuana known as Kine Bud. “Why don’t you sit down here, and we’ll do this.” He points to a small bar in the room adjacent the living room. Several 1920s-style marijuana propaganda posters hang on the blue, sloppily painted walls. Jay takes a seat behind the bar. A poster of a man grinning and holding a joint hangs behind him with the caption, “Marijuana: Hey, at least it’s not crack!”

“So what do you want to know?” he asks, grinning, his eyes glazed over. Slightly purple circles lie beneath his eyes, his face is dead pale and his moppy, frizzy brown hair is scattered about. I tell him I want to know about selling marijuana, and his smile widens.

He lights up a joint that appears to have already been more than half smoked. He offers it to me, but I decline.

“I never really did anything in high school,” he says. “I rarely smoked, and I never dealt or anything. The first time I got high was when I was 15, but I would only smoke maybe once every three or four months. Right before I came to college, I progressively started smoking more."

Jay fidgets on the stool, bouncing off it as if he just remembered something he had to do; then he sits back down immediately. He looks uncomfortable, and his voice is soft and full of mumbles. He says he’s always paranoid because people he knows are in jail for selling drugs.

“A lot of people close to me, higher-ups — really higher-ups — have gotten busted,” he says. “Two personal friends of mine are in jail, and they went down just for weed. My original dealer got busted with 400 pounds. Actually, it was two counts of 200 pounds, because he had it in two separate storage lockers. I’m sure he talked because he was looking at 20 years, and he’ll probably get out in two. He was two steps down from the main source, the grower, which was the Mexican mafia.”

Jay looks down at the yellowed joint, which has stopped burning, and he throws it in the ashtray. Smoke lingers around the bar, grayish light rays forming through the clouds.

“There’s times when you’re getting rid of pounds in a week, you know, making a couple thousand dollars like it’s nothing, not even noticing it — it just keeps coming in,” he says. “Things are just moving too fast, and that’s when people get fucking stupid, and they get

“If I just do small deals and try to push it out as fast as I can, I could make nearly $5,000 profit.

You do that for 52 weeks, that’s $250,000 to $260,000 a year.”
greedy and they get caught. That’s why I don’t really fuck with it too much anymore, except for favors to my friends. “I’m not going to jail for weed. That’s fucking stupid.”

Jay’s voice rises as he begins ranting about how much he hates the current laws on drugs.

“You can get it anywhere,” he says. “You can bust however many people you want — it’s never going to get to the point. Everything the lawmakers are doing right now is working in reverse. The ‘war on drugs’ is supplying drugs. If they were really smart, they’d just make it legal and make a profit.”

He stops and looks at me. “I’m sorry, what were we talking about?”

Jay says he has pretty much stopped buying large quantities of marijuana. “It just depends what people tell me,” he says. “I try not to have anything in the house anymore. But there’s times when I’ll hold on to a couple ounces just for myself.”

He was busted a couple of years ago with a bong when he was living in the dorms. Once, he also nearly got busted with five pounds on him. “I got pulled over, and I had five pounds in my pants,” he says. “If the cop would have made me get out of the car, I would have been done.”

This, he says, is one of the reasons he doesn’t like to sell much anymore. But he concedes he could make a lot of money if he went back to his old ways. “Figure a pound a week,” he says. “If I just do small deals and try to push it out as fast as I can, I could make nearly $5,000 profit. You do that for 52 weeks, that’s $250,000 to $260,000 a year. I mean, come on. What do you have to do? Couple hours of work, a hell of a lot of risk. But then again, I don’t do that anymore, and when I did, I wouldn’t sell it all in small little bags. It takes too long. I’d usually make about $1,000 profit. I always doubled my money.”

He adds that he got cheap prices because he was three steps down from the source. The most he says he ever saw was 150 pounds, and the most he’s ever been involved with was five pounds. But no matter how much marijuana he sells, Jay doesn’t like to be called a drug dealer.

“I hate calling myself that,” he said. “It’s just weed. It doesn’t go through a treatment process or anything like that. It’s naturally occurring in a plant. It’s there for a reason. But if the law of the land’s gonna call me a drug dealer, that’s what they’re gonna call me.”

He says he has never dealt with any harder drugs.

“I don’t fuck with that,” he says. “The only time I messed with anything was some ecstasy, but that was just for myself, a little experimentation.”

Jay says he primarily sticks with marijuana, and he feels he’s hooked.

“I believe in its medicinal qualities, but I definitely have a chemical dependency on it,” he says. “I feel if I go a day without getting fucked up, I won’t sleep right.”

I look over at the two people sitting in the living room, and I ask him if this is a place where people like to hang out. As he says it isn’t, two more people enter the house, one of them his roommate. He stops the other guy, Tim, and laughs, saying, “I just got done telling him, ‘No, it’s not a place where people hang out.’ There’s like a hundred people coming through. It’s Friday, what do you expect? Everyone wants to hang out. Hang out with the man. THE MAN.”

After asking what the hell I’m doing, Tim heads over to the couch. Jay’s roommate leaves right away to go to work. Reinvigorated by all the commotion, Jay looks at me and says, “I want to get stoned,” not realizing he had just finished smoking about 45 minutes ago. “Right now. All this talk about weed makes we wanna get stoned,” he sings.

Photo Illustration by Glenn Luther
ask where the bathroom is, and Jay points me upstairs. “Hey, after you’re done, go to the back room and check it out. I’m moving it tomorrow.”

Toward the back room, a stream of light creeps beneath a closet door. Inside, a small marijuana plant sits, perfectly pyramidal in shape, with a fluorescent light on top and on bottom. The smell isn’t too strong, but the plant’s color is bright green, and some of the leaves are getting big. The stalk is thick, and the plant looks very healthy.

I walk downstairs and tell Jay that he has a nice felony upstairs, and he says that’s why he’s moving it. “I’ve got a good place to put it,” he says without further elaboration.

I sit down on the couch next to Tim. Everyone is quiet, and I take a moment to look around as Jay rolls a large joint in the middle of the floor on a small wooden table that looks like a shipping crate. The walls are a nasty lime green color (“alfalfa,” Jay says), and again they’re sloppily painted. A print of Vincent Van Gogh’s “Starry Night” hangs on one wall, and a psychedelic poster sits behind the television. The room is dark, and Jay sits down next to me and lights the joint. A big cloud of smoke fills the room, and everyone begins staring at Jay as he takes a hit. The joint gets passed around while everyone watches the TV — O.J. Simpson starring in “The Naked Gun.” O.J. is doing a drug stakeout and listens as someone mentions selling heroin.

“Yeah, you would say ‘heroin’ if you were a heroin dealer,” Jay says sarcastically. Just then, another of Jay’s friends walks in the back door. “People just walk through the fucking door. No, this isn’t the place to hang out, again.”

The friend, Steve, walks into the living room and introduces himself. “He doesn’t smoke,” Jay says as he tries to pass the joint to him.

“I’m just tired,” Steve says.

“I’m just tired,’ so don’t smoke?” Jay asks mockingly. “Just get a little buzz. It’ll energize you. It’s a rainy Friday afternoon, and there ain’t shit going on. Might as well get high.”

Steve declines again, but later I see him take a hit.


The woman, Deb, says that she used a special kit she bought at a vitamin store to pass a drug test for work.

“The drink works,” she says. “But you have to quit at least 48 hours before. I had to work for my dad for the summer, so I had to make sure I passed it. It tasted like Sunny Delight.”

Everyone is getting lively, conversations intensify and everyone starts laughing at each other. Steve and Jay begin talking about a computer game based on drug dealing that they downloaded off the Internet.

I ask what they’re talking about, and they get all excited and describe the game.

“You’re just a drug dealer, basically,” Jay says.

“Buy and sell drugs,” Steve says.

“That’s all you do.”

“It’s fucked up,” Jay says. “You make trillions of dollars.”

“There’s all this weed in front of you, and you got this gun, and you just try to shoot down all these guys who try and steal your weed,” Steve says.

“DEA agents try and come down and burn your crops, and you shoot ‘em out of the sky,” Jay says. “They bring bombs, and then they bring crop dusters, and you gotta shoot all this shit out of the fucking sky. The final levels, you smoke a bong, and it just blows everybody up. And if your plants die,
He stops to think for a minute. Then he says, 'There's some days I'd like to tell my mom.'

He pauses again, then offers to show me his bong collection.

the weed gods come down and replenish your weed. It's fucked up.

Everyone seems to be pretty high by now, and they all are staring at the television again, too stoned to talk. Rick who has been sitting on the couch since I came in, looks at Jay and raises his eyebrows and nods toward the stairs. They go upstairs with Steve. Ten minutes later, they all come down, and Steve and Rick leave. I look at Jay like I know what's going on, and he just smiles, sits back down and asks me what else I want to know. I decide to kill the buzz and ask him if his mom knows what he does.

She caught him with a quarter pound once, back when he was in high school, he says.

"I don't think she knew I dealt or anything, but she knew I was messing around with a lot. She threatened to kick me out of the house." His voice drops down to a hoarse whisper. "That wasn't fun, but everything was cool between us after that. She just kind of dropped it."

He stops to think for a minute. Then he says, "There's some days I'd like to tell my mom." He pauses again, then offers to show me his bong collection.

We walk into the kitchen, and he opens a lower cupboard to the right of the sink. Three shelves are covered with various drug paraphernalia.

"This was one of my first bongs," he says, handing me a cracked glass bong that he says his friend blew for him.

"And this was my brother's original bong," he says while showing me a fluorescent orange bong with a skull jester sticker with the word "Graffix" underneath it.

He pulls out more utensils, including a purple glass bong, two pipes, rolling papers, filters for a pipe, screens for a pipe, hoses for bongs, a "one-hitter" that looks like a car cigarette lighter, and a 3-foot-high plastic bong.

"This hits smooth as fuck," he says. I survey his collection, and we sit back down at the bar and talk some more. I've been here for almost three hours, and I'm about ready to go when Jay adds one last thought.

"You know, if I had it to do all over again, I would do it again," he says. "I've hit the highs and the lows, but I've always had fun."

I ask him if he thinks he will ever get caught, and he laughs.

"They're not going to come after me because it would be so hard for them to get close to me, to get evidence they need to prosecute me, because I only deal with my friends.

"For that matter, it would be a waste of their time to get a couple of ounces. It goes on day in and day out around here. I couldn't even count up the number of people I know that deal in this area on my fingers and toes. It's just ridiculous.

"And for every person I know, there's at least three that I don't — you know what I mean?"
Xin Jian of Kent starts her Saturday mornings with a session of Falun Gong that is composed of five sets of exercises.

Right: The core teachings of Falun Gong are found in the book Zhuan Falun (Revolving the Law Wheel) by Li Hongzhi. The book is translated into more than 10 major languages.
On Sept. 15, Falun Gong practitioners meditate on a bright, sunny morning in Kent before they march on to Hudson. From Aug. 29 to Sept. 17, Ohio practitioners passed through 52 cities, starting in Cincinnati and ending in Cleveland, as part of the SOS! Walk For Justice to spread the principles of Falun Gong and raise awareness of the persecution and torture of practitioners in China.

A biker stops and observes about 20 Falun Gong practitioners and supporters marching at the corner of Crain Avenue and state Route 43.

Who ever thought deep breathing and exercise could get you thrown in jail?

For the past two years, Chinese followers of Falun Gong, a self-improvement practice, say they have been stripped of their human rights.

Falun Gong, or Falun Dafa, is said to improve the body, mind and spirit through exercise, meditation and teachings. Based on the traditional Chinese principles of truthfulness, benevolence and tolerance, it includes five sets of gentle exercises.

First introduced to the public by spiritual leader Li Hongzhi, on May 13, 1992, Falun Gong was initially endorsed by the Chinese government because of the health benefits it brought to practitioners. But the unexpected increase in followers in a short time, and the view that those followers were politically motivated, prompted the Communist Party to classify Falun Gong a cult.

On July 24, 1996, distribution of all Falun Gong publications was banned. In 1999, Chinese President Jiang Zemin issued a ban on Falun Gong itself.

But that hasn't stopped the practitioners in China or other countries. In fact, Falun Gong's mix of meditation and exercise can be found in the parks and front yards around Kent.

A Falun Gong practitioner points to a photo of a victim tortured to death by Beijing police. According to a Falun Gong Human Rights Special Report in July 2000, about 50,000 people have been arbitrarily detained, at least 242 of whom have been sent to prison for up to 18 years. While in police custody, torture and humiliation is common. As of Aug. 14, 2001, at least 263 Falun Gong practitioners had died at the hands of the Chinese government.

Ying Wan of Columbus passes out fliers about Falun Gong during the SOS! Walk for Justice.
Fandy Liu, a graduate student at Kent State, goes through the exercises of Falun Gong outside of her apartment. Liu has been studying the self-improvement practice for about four years and says her objectives in life have changed since she began practicing.
Falun Gong exercises. In early 1999, an official investigation showed more than 70 million Chinese citizens practiced Falun Gong, a number exceeding the Chinese Communist party membership. In more than 45 different countries, including the United States, the practice has been adopted by more than 100 million people.

Left: Falun Gong has no membership. It is taught by volunteers like Xin Jian (right), of Kent, and Fandy Liu (middle), who came to Kent from China in 1995. Margi Lofaro (left), also of Kent, meets with the women outside the Allerton Apartments every Saturday morning to learn and participate in the exercises.

Left: Fandy Liu casts a shadow as she goes through Falun Gong exercises. In early 1999, an official investigation showed more than 70 million Chinese citizens practiced Falun Gong, a number exceeding the Chinese Communist party membership. In more than 45 different countries, including the United States, the practice has been adopted by more than 100 million people.

Left: At Goodyear Heights Park in Akron, Saxon Irwin of Akron goes through the five exercises of Falun Gong as he listens to Chinese folk music and Master Li on tape. The routine takes about two hours. "It's changed my life in terms of morality.... It's been a wonderful journey. I don't drink anymore. I am more compassionate. And I think of others more so than myself."

Below: Walkers pass through Kent during the SOS! Walk for Justice.
Mike Johnston grew up in Los Angeles, where he said he had to join a gang to survive in the city. The skinhead group, which he joined when he was 12, offered the best option, he said.
Welcome to Mr. Johnston's neighborhood
Friday night, Kent, Ohio: The smell of a barbecue mingles with the sounds of conversation and music. Just an ordinary party in an ordinary college town. But the men talking over Guinness are anything but ordinary. The toes of their combat boots gleam with reflections of their shaved heads. Most of them have shaved heads—even some of the women—and everyone is wearing flight jackets.

The music is different, too. White-power bands blare from the speakers instead of Britney or Jay-Z.
Meet the local skin crew.

For about a year, this group of independent skinheads has been gathering on West Main Street, and during that time the group has attracted about a dozen of the curious, the disillusioned and the angry.

Independent skinheads are similar to other racially motivated groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Black Panthers, because they believe in the power of their race, said Joe Roy, director of the Southern Poverty Law Center's Intelligence Project in Montgomery, Ala.

"There are distinct areas of a skinhead group, but there is a lot of overlapping with the Klan as well," he said. "Some skinheads identify themselves as being religious in a Christian manner. Some identify with being devil worshippers or even neo-pagans."

Skinheads operate as local gangs and can be characterized as independent, Roy said.

"Generally, independents hold the same beliefs as other skinheads," he said. "They just don't affiliate with a specific-named organization."

Mike Johnston, 26, is the leader of the group in Kent. He said skinheads want to contribute to the community by being diligent and peaceful, but they are also proud of their Aryan heritage.

"What I mean by white pride is that I am proud to be white and living by the standards that were placed by my ancestors," Johnston said. "In terms of standards, I mean taking care of my family, being an honest, hard-working individual and doing anything for my own people. Another standard is not tolerating race mixing because it destroys our race as well as the race we are mixing with."

Johnston is so proud he has used his body as an open expression of white pride with tattoos of the Confederate battle flag on one arm and a swastika on his chest. He also has pictures of Adolf Hitler hanging on the walls of his house.

But Johnston does not consider his tattoos or his affiliation with skinheads to be representative of hate.

"The swastika is a symbol of pride to me because people were fighting under this symbol long before it was affiliated with Hitler," Johnston said.

According to several dictionaries, the swastika was used as a positive symbol to represent life, sun, power, strength and good luck before the Nazis appropriated the symbol.

"If people are going to consider the swastika a hate symbol, they might as well call the Christian cross a hate symbol, too, because of the crusades. I do not consider myself to be involved in a hate group because to truly hate something or somebody you have to hate

Johnston's tattoos, in particular the swastika, represent his beliefs. He said his parents may not agree with his beliefs, but they support him. His father taught him that if he believes in something, he should believe in it 100 percent.
‘The swastika is a symbol of pride to me because people were fighting under this symbol long before it was affiliated with Hitler.’

Johnston has participated in white supremacy groups since he was a teen-ager in California.

“I saw a lot of Mexican immigrants moving in my neighborhood and taking jobs because they were all so willing to work for less. It was seeing my Dad get replaced by an illegal immigrant that opened my eyes.”

Johnston says he feels all minorities are unqualified in every profession they enter. He said most employers go along with affirmative action whether or not the black or Latino person is qualified for the job, and that most minorities know they are nowhere near as qualified as whites. It’s only that they have the law and the pity of society supporting them.

Randy Blazak, an assistant professor of sociology at Portland State University in Oregon, has spent more than eight years studying skinheads in the United States and Europe.

“Many kids get involved because they experience some first- or second-hand downward mobility,” Blazak said. “The propaganda around the changing face of the American Dream is just as powerful ... the perception that all white people are moving down, and all minority people are moving up.”

Blazak said these groups also appeal to young people because of what he refers to as the “conspiracy theory.”

“The conspiracy theory basically gives these kids a minority to point their fingers at to explain why their lives are so messed up,” Blazak said.

Matt Morris, a 20-year-old freshman flight technology major at Kent State, has also participated in white supremacy groups since he was a teen-ager. Unlike Johnston, Morris grew up in Bay Village, where downward mobility was not a reality for him. His attraction to white supremacy grew from his time in the U.S. Army, where he served more than a year as private first-class before he was discharged for medical reasons.

“I remember when I was in Kuwait, all the whites were just expected to do all the work, while the blacks just slacked off,” Morris said. “No one said a word about it, as if it was OK.”

Morris, who now lives with Johnston on West Main Street, said it was witnessing this unfair treatment that encouraged him to look into white supremacy groups.

“The whole thing got me to thinking about the real situation between blacks and whites, so I just started to do some research on the Internet and what I found really made sense to me,” Morris said. He found the National Socialist Movement’s Web site and its P.O. box. He contacted the movement, which is how he met Johnston.

Johnston was a sergeant in the National Socialist Movement, a politically motivated, neo-Nazi group that ranked its members much like the military. But he had problems with his commanding officer, so he dropped out of the group.

The military style of the movement was nothing new for Johnston because he had six years experience in the Army.
‘The whole reality is that we are your plumbers, your construction workers, your firefighters, your paramedics, and soon we will be your police officers.’

— three as an Airborne Ranger.

In fact, a majority of the members have had some sort of military and weapons experience, Johnston said.

Roy, of the Southern Poverty Law Center, said some people may consider this mixture of hate and weapon experience threatening since skinheads are generally viewed as a violent group.

“These groups have a gang-like mentality,” Roy said. “They can, and will, become violent if provoked.”

Johnston said skinheads can be considered more violent in comparison to other white supremacy groups with a history of violence, like the Ku Klux Klan, because skinheads never back down from a fight. If someone incites a fight, whether verbal or physical, they will respond with violence if that’s what it takes, he said.

Detective Karen Travis of the Kent Police Department, who monitors hate-group activities, said there hasn’t been any problems with racially motivated groups in the 15 years she’s worked at the department.

“Residents of Kent shouldn’t fear us at all because we don’t like to make trouble for ourselves,” Johnston said. “A lot of people have this misconception of skinheads. We’re always being compared to gang-bangers when all we want is to keep our neighborhoods safe from slime and criminals on the streets.”

Targeting specific minority groups is another misconception society has of skinheads, Morris said.

“I can’t stand seeing minorities milk the system,” he said, “but targeting a person because they are just black or just Jewish is not what our group is about.”

“There is no point in us going after blacks and Jews, or any minorities for that matter, just to beat on them,” Johnston said. “We don’t mix with them or talk with them at all. ... They simply don’t exist to us until they come into our neighborhoods and start shit.”

He said skinheads are “regular people,” meaning they go to work and do what they can to contribute to society.

“The whole reality is that we are your plumbers, your construction workers, your firefighters, your paramedics, and soon we will be your police officers,” Johnston said.

Johnston is a firefighter for Rootstown Fire Department. He said his beliefs do not interfere with his job because he keeps his work and his personal life separate.

It’s a feeling of family that attracts many members to independent movements, Johnston said. He explained that a person has to get to know the group to become a member.

“It isn’t like you can just pay 20 bucks and you’re automatically in,” Johnston said. “Skinheads are a sort of family, so they only accept those they’ve gotten to know really well.”

Most people get interested through word of mouth.

Skinheads, Johnston said, do not seek out members by way of fliers or recruitment. When someone is accepted into the group as a member; he doesn’t go through some ritualistic ceremony. People know they’re in when they are invited to attend more and more of the group’s meetings.

White power music also attracts its share of people to the movement.

Various skinhead groups, along with other white supremacy groups, sponsor concerts with funding from each group’s monthly dues. The last concert was held during the summer in Pittsburgh.

It is through performances that white supremacy groups gain new recruits.

Angry Aryans is a hatecore/west power metal band. The group’s last album, Too White For You, contains the song “Advocation of Violence.”

“Faggots with AIDS/ Stalking your kids/ Shylock Jew/ With beady little eyes. Do it now! They’ve got to die!” the song says as it relates different ways to kill Jews, blacks, “race mixers” and homosexuals.

Blazak said the music not only reinforces white supremacy beliefs, but it also gives the movement legitimacy.

“It (the music) is a subculture just like hip-hop is a subculture,” Blazak said. “When the bands play live, they get the hard-core followers but also the friends of those people and the girlfriends and the curious. It can be very seductive.”

Johnston said although the outer look of the whole movement may grab the attention of a curious few, the worst thing a person can do is get involved solely for the image.

“Any skin crew I’ve ever been involved in or known doesn’t particularly want someone who just wants to belong to something because being a skinhead is not part of some fad,” Johnston said. “You are either passionate at heart or not at all. We want members for quality, not quantity.”

Literature posted on the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Web site (www.splcenter.org) describes how important image is to skinhead groups. According to the site, protecting their image and being true to their image is of dire importance to skinheads in general.

Morris said although the image is important, it isn’t everything.

“Yes, we all wear Doc Martens, and some of us wear flight jackets, but it is the positive image we try to portray by working hard that is important ... not the actual physical image,” Morris said.

Johnston agreed with Morris and said skinheads aren’t fitting the mold that society has made for them anymore.

“We are definitely becoming more modernized,” Johnston said. “Skinheads don’t necessarily have to shave their heads. That’s an individual’s choice. The reason we shave our heads is because it’s German and Irish family workers used to shave their heads when working in the factories in Europe. A shaved head symbolized the working class.”

Johnston continued explaining the modernization of the movement saying organizations are diversifying in terms of sex and age.

“We also don’t refer to ourselves as a community anymore since we have women and young boys and girls involved nationwide,” Johnston said.

Members between the ages of 12 and 18 are viewed as the younger siblings of the family.

“They contribute by keeping up a positive image by continuing their education, staying out of trouble and acquiring a strong work ethic by the time they’re 16 years old,” Johnston said.

Most of the women are members’ girlfriends, but they still take part in the meetings, Johnston said.

The meetings, he said, are held on a monthly basis and are very similar to any community meeting.

“Generally we talk about how each individual is upholding the skinhead standards and beliefs in their personal and professional lives.”

Johnston said skinheads, as a whole, are trying to change the stereotype that has been attached to their organization by liberals.

The best way for communities to deal with hate groups is through education, Roy said. The Southern Poverty Law Center’s Web site has several links that deal with teaching tolerance at home, in the community and especially at school.
Blazak, the professor at Portland State University, agreed education plays a vital role in fighting hate groups, but, he said, teaching tolerance is the wrong way of going about it.

"The best way for a community to handle a white supremacy group is by not tolerating the intolerant," Blazak said. These groups choose communities that do not put up much of a fight or give much response to their presence, Blazak said. He believed there are two important things to consider when dealing with the management of a hate group within a community.

"The first and most important thing is to respect other people's Constitutional rights to be as stupid as they want to be," Blazak said. "The second thing community members should do is speak up and let these groups know that their beliefs are not tolerated within your community. Because if you tolerate their presence, you are, in a sense, letting them think it's accepted."

Immediate condemnation is the best response, Blazak said. White supremacy groups need to see that the community doesn't welcome them and the residents do not share their beliefs. If they don't, white supremacists will feel they have found a viable recruiting ground.

"Teaching and educating anti-racism to the younger generation is the first step. The most important step is getting people to realize how much we celebrate diversity in everyday life."

Johnston said his beliefs do not interfere with his responsibilities as a fireman at the Rootstown Fire Department.
Mom

Two Kent residents had traditional childhoods despite non-traditional parents.
Shannon Parchem’s mom never really “came out” to her. But Shannon always knew her mother, Patricia, was a lesbian.

For as long as she can remember, her mother’s partner of 19 years, Candace Zimmerman, picked her up from school, helped her with homework, attended parent/teacher conferences and spent the holidays with her.

Shannon, a senior family studies major, said she never wondered where her father was. There was always Candace.

“I’d go to school, and kids would be like, ‘Where’s your dad?’ And I’d say, ‘I have two moms,’” Shannon said. “It’s always been pretty normal to me.”

It isn’t normal for everyone.

However, research continues to cite no significant difference between children with gay parents and children with straight ones. Those interviewed said they experienced normal childhoods even though they have always identified their parents as homosexual. And while the issue of gay parenting remains controversial, parents and their children are speaking out about their experiences, strengthening their resolve to raise families like everyone else.

“It’s just been like: This is my mom, and this is my mom’s girlfriend,” Josh Spainhoward of Kent said. “I always knew mom as a lesbian.”

In fact, more gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered parents are raising children, according to Family Pride Coalition, an Oak Park, Ill.-based support group for gay parents and their children.

The number of people in Ohio who identified themselves as part of a same-sex couple increased roughly 400 percent this year — to 18,937 — according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

However, same-sex couples still face hurdles if they decide to parent. Most states, like Ohio, don’t allow joint adoptions for same-sex couples. And homosexuality, in general, still triggers prejudice and hate.

Judy Spainhoward, who lives in Akron with her partner, Joyce Elliot, said she had initial concerns that her children would be treated differently because she was gay. At the time, though, she says she was more concerned about being a single mother.

She got married because she had feelings for her husband and it was the accepted thing to do. She didn’t know she was gay. She said once she got married, she figured her feelings for her husband would grow.

They didn’t, and she divorced in 1983, the same year she met a woman at work and realized she had feelings for her.

“I thought, ‘Wow, I think I want to be with that woman,’” she said. “All the pieces of why I could never fall in love with my husband became very clear.”

Her ex-husband found out when Josh told him he saw his mother kissing a woman in the kitchen.

Judy’s ex-husband called her and
Josh, Judy and Joyce stand for a simple family snapshot in the kitchen where they have had many discussions and eaten many meals together. Josh said he has never had a problem with his mom’s sexuality. In fact, when he was a child and someone asked him if his friends talked about his mother’s sexuality, he replied, “No, we have better things to talk about.”
about having a lesbian mother. "In second or third grade, I told this kid who was coming over, 'I've gotta tell you something: My mom's a lesbian.' And he was like: 'What is that?' And I was like: 'Ah, forget it.'"

Fred Vallinos, chair and associate professor of psychology at the University of West Florida, has studied the social, emotional and moral aspects of homosexuality within human development.

He said debate still exists on the issue of gay parenting but society is becoming more accepting.

"We're heading toward more diversity, but I wouldn't jump the gun and say we're even close to being there," he said.

"There's a general acceptance of gayness or lesbianism on the part of the general public, but as far as the behavior itself, most people are still traditional in their views."

He said at this point, whether gays and lesbians are fit parents is inconclusive.

"The initial results indicate that there is no significant impact affecting the quality of parenting that makes the difference," he said. "Those who say it will have a negative effect in terms of general aspects of social, emotional and psychological development, provide better role models for children," but that doesn't mean that homosexuals can't be good parents.

Hartkop said more talk about gay-parenting rights creates a chaotic environment, affecting insurance issues and the broader social infrastructure of the state.

"By sanctioning these things, you're basically moving toward a chaotic environment where there are no rules."

Shannon, who grew up in Minneapolis, said she realized her mom was gay when she was 5. During college, Patricia said she called herself bisexual and got married because she was in love with her husband, who knew of her bisexuality but never made an issue of it.

The two eventually split, and Patricia started dating women years later when she met Candace at a coffee shop.

Patricia came out in the early '80s and audaciously raised a child and maintained a relationship with a woman at a time when homosexuality was less accepted, psychological studies deemed gays and lesbians unfit for parenthood and fewer were open and out about their sexuality.

Like Judy, Patricia was more concerned about being a single parent than being a gay one.

"It wasn't one moment sitting down and saying: 'Hey, I'm a lesbian.' There was never a discussion or a speech."

Her family, who was very accepting of her sexuality, was not concerned about Patricia's ability to raise Shannon.

"I think everybody went through it differently," she said. "I think my mother's concern was, would I be happy?"

Patricia said Shannon noticed a difference because she would talk about having two moms. In the second grade, someone told Shannon she couldn't have two moms, and Shannon said, "Yes, I do."

"We warned Shannon this is something you need to feel safe in talking about," she said. "There are people who are mean."

Candace said she didn't want to push herself on Shannon's friends. "I think certain kids figured out," she said. "Pat and I aren't ones for advertising. They'd come over after school and sleepovers. And really for the most part, none of them ever had any kind of negative reaction or any kind of bias, like: 'Ew! That's gross!' Most of them were like: 'OK, she's just there. She's just another one of the moms.'"

Sometimes Shannon referred to Candace as her "stepmom," and none of her friends ever questioned it. Sometimes she'd refer to her as her mother's "friend from college." It just depended.

When she had sleepovers, sometimes she would make it seem like her mother's girlfriend slept in the living room regularly.

As time moved on, Shannon said she became more comfortable telling friends. She later only dated guys who were accepting of her parents.

Candace said she had concerns of...
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her own before becoming a parent.

"Sure, I was nervous," she said. "I had to think about if I wanted to do this and how I wanted to do this. Did I want to take a full parental role or stepparent role early on?"

"I thought if I was going to do this, it was better for Shannon if I was going to be a full parent," she said. "I know that I can't do it part way."

"I didn't like her at first," Shannon said. "I'd say, 'You're not my mom. You're not telling me what to do.'"

Candace said she didn't try to serve as the father figure to Shannon.

"That's where uncles and friends come in," she said. "You're gonna get your male influence from other people."

Both families said growing up with gay parents actually had some benefits.

Shannon said she knows other children whose parents are gay, and they're ashamed. She doesn't understand why.

"As a female, I had two females to..."
tell me what’s going to happen through life— with boys,” she said. “And growing up with gay parents made me more accepting of other people.”

Most people think gays are unfit parents, and that’s not true, Candace said. “You don’t know,” she said. “You don’t experience it. How can you judge that I don’t love my daughter?”

Gays and lesbians are just as competent at parenting, Patricia said. She said a parent’s sexual preference isn’t the issue. “The issue is how well a parent can parent,” she said.

Josh said having gay parents has made him more open and accepting of others. He still hears negative comments about homosexuals but has learned to block them out. “People are like, ‘Ah, man, your mom’s a lesbian. That’s too bad. I feel sorry for you,’” he said. “And I’m just like: What are you talking about? Why feel bad for me when I have two people who care about me?”
Faith-based Initiative
More students are finding **fellowship** in religious organizations

**Story by Jason LeRoy**
**Photos by Rosemary Reilman**

Michelle Robertson, a third-year human development and family studies student at Kent State, never called herself a religious person. During her freshman year, she went to the Late Night Christian Fellowship. She didn't like the scene.

But after experiencing a series of obstacles involving drugs and alcohol, she rediscovered God and was hooked.

While many college students tend to shy away from religion, some, like Robertson, are rediscovering it. Numerous religious groups in Kent report an increase in student participation.

Students are joining religious groups, experts say, because they want to feel a sense of belonging and realize religion may be the way. The tragic events of Sept. 11 also may have prompted more to practice.

“Student groups — any group — provide students with some social support,” says David Odell-Scott, associate professor of philosophy and coordinator of religion studies. “Religious student groups, in some instances, provide students with the opportunity to associate with persons who share the religious culture they are familiar with or associated with while growing up.”

Shelby Black, director of Late Night Christian Fellowship, says she has seen a 40 percent increase in Late Night attendance over the past four years, now averaging 95 people a week. And Rick McKee, of The Dive, a branch of Campus Crusade for Christ, says he has seen a “three-fold growth over the last year.”

“College students are looking at the emptiness of atheism through a perspective of 'been there, done that, and found it lacking,’” McKee says. “Many students are searching for real meaning, significance and purpose. These things don’t come from beauty, wealth or power — the unholy trinity of our aspirations.”

But Christian groups aren't the only ones experiencing surges. Jennifer Chestnut, director of the student Jewish group Hillel, says attendance at Shabbat, the Friday night Sabbath dinners, has doubled in the last three years.

Sarah Shendy of the Muslim Students Association attributes the increase of participation in her group to a natural progression of things.

“The way I see it is that every generation is more curious than the past. Every generation has new beliefs and new thoughts that are discovered only by people's questions and interests,” she says.

Shendy says the Muslim Students Association tries to use a lot of “interesting quotes and various attention getters to not only attract the campus but also the media. Mainly things that leave people hanging that make them think and want to come back for more.”

Kati Mallady, a second-year psychology student, has always thought of herself as a religious person. She says she prides herself on knowing all sorts of information about different religions without actually being a member of any of them.

Mallady, who attends Neo-Pagan Coalition meetings every day, learned about the group from fliers on campus and decided to give it a shot.
Eddie Holt (left), a second-year computer science major, and Ben Graves (right), a fourth-year undeclared major, clap and sing at Late Night.

“We walk around in weird clothes, we do our rituals in public.... People see these things and get interested,” she says. “When people get tired of all the old faiths, they start looking for new options. And that’s what the KNPC is: new options.”

Shelby Black of Late Night sees the religious rise in societal and media-oriented terms.

“Spirituality has become hip,” Black says. “It really wasn’t back in the ‘80s, but over the last 10 years, there’s been a rise in New Age... There seems to be more of a market now for contemporary Christian culture.”

Black says American culture has become very “relativistic,” with more of a “Your truth can be your truth, and my truth can be my truth” mentality. And word-of-mouth helps.

The Rev. Amy “Zon” Mundhenk of the Kent Neo-Pagan Coalition, who is ordained through the Universalist Church, says she doesn’t think people are becoming more spiritual but rather are putting up a spiritual appearance in public.

Mundhenk says her group uses eye-catching, humorous fliers to attract students. And they grabbed the attention of senior graphic design major Aurora “Aurelia” Mallin.

“I had a few friends during my freshman year who were really trying to get me to come,” she says. “When I finally went, it was only to make them happy. Then I just sort of never...stopped...going. Why would you stop going once you’re in?”

Alec Heisey, who works with Late Night, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Kent Prez Ministries, says these groups have had success with tables at campus events, like the Back-to-School Blast-Off and the Black Squirrel Festival.

“Coffee houses and other social events provide contexts for students to connect and find out about other groups,” he says.

Ultimately, a sense of community helps draw in students.

“Students are looking to build community,” Hillel’s Chestnut says. “On a large campus, students form their communities in many places: their residence halls, sports teams, clubs and within their faith community. Students are looking to be welcomed and to fit in.

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Sometimes it’s easiest to start in a place where you already have something in common.”

But the Sept. 11 tragedy also has drawn some students to religion. Chestnut said tragedies usually evoke two responses: Some look to their faith, and others denounce it.

“We are seeing both of these responses,” she says.

The Rev. Scott Crocker of Impact Movement, an African American Christian group, says a growing interest in spiritual issues in America could arise from this tragedy alone.

“The recent tragic events in New York and Washington, and the rise in church attendance and prayer gatherings that followed, demonstrated the growing interest in spiritual issues in our country,” says Crocker, who has seen as many as 75 students attending meetings.

To this day, Robertson still credits religion as her life-saver.

“I really didn’t think I was good enough for Christians, and I didn’t think I was good enough for God,” she said. “I thought I was too messed-up, too dirty. But I came dirty, and they loved me. I brought all my bags of crap, and they helped me sort through them.”

American culture has become very ‘relativistic,’ with more of a ‘Your truth can be your truth, and my truth can be my truth’ mentality.

At the Jewish Hillel Center, Ben Rodriguez, a senior political science major, Jillian Adler, a staff member at the Hillel Center, and Jenny Weissman, a junior political science and pre-law major (left to right), build a sukkah, or hut, as a reminder of all the miracles God has performed for them on Sukkot — the Jewish harvest holiday.
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