

FIRST IN A THREE-PART SERIES

# The Killer Cure

One prescription painkiller  
has a unique ability to kill  
if you don't take it exactly as directed ...  
and sometimes even if you do.



KENNY KEMP photo/Sunday Gazette-Mail

## Deaths tied to methadone escalate across state, nation

### Feds approve outdated, potentially deadly drug information

By Scott Finn and Tara Tuckwiller  
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One increasingly popular painkiller is helping to kill more people than any other prescription narcotic, a Sunday Gazette-Mail investigation has found.

Patients could die if they take the "usual adult dosage" on methadone's package insert — information that comes with the prescription and was approved by the federal government.

Despite knowing about methadone's dangers, federal officials have not strengthened the warnings most doctors and patients receive about methadone, Sunday Gazette-Mail reporters discovered.

Methadone, once given mostly to heroin addicts to ease their cravings, now is being prescribed by more doctors to treat pain. Insurance companies favor it because it is cheap and effective.

But methadone helped to kill three times as many Americans in 2003 as it did in 1999, death certificates reveal, and medical examiners blame it for more overdose deaths than any other narcotic drug except cocaine. This previously unpublished information comes from an analysis of death certificates requested by the Gazette-Mail and conducted by the National Vital Statistics System, part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics.

West Virginia led the nation in accidental overdose deaths blamed on methadone in 2003, with a death rate four times higher than the national average, the data shows. It was followed by Kentucky, North Carolina, Maine and New Hampshire.

Methadone contributed to 2,992 deaths nationwide in 2003, up from 790 four years earlier, according to the data.

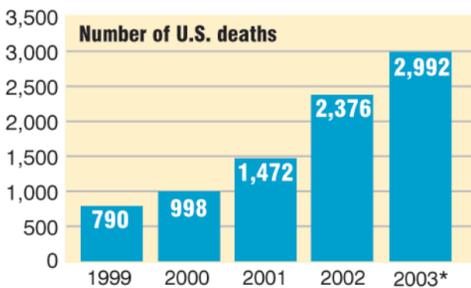
That's more deaths in one year than the U.S. military has suffered during the conflict in Iraq. Medical examiners ruled 82 percent of those deaths accidental.

Methadone often is confused with the illegal drug methamphetamine. But methadone is a completely different, legal medication.

The media often portray methadone overdose victims as drug addicts and criminals who steal it or buy it illegally off the street. But a significant number of victims were prescribed the drug

#### Methadone overdose deaths on the rise in U.S., West Virginia

Medical examiners are blaming more deaths than ever on the prescription drug methadone. These numbers reflect only deaths when methadone is listed on the death certificate after an autopsy.



\*Most recent year available

SOURCE: National Vital Statistics System, National Center for Health Statistics



SOURCE: West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources

BRENDA PINNELL graphics/Sunday Gazette-Mail

to treat their pain, according to studies shared with the Gazette-Mail by researchers in three states.

Some of those victims took the drug as prescribed and died anyway, family members said in legal filings and in telephone interviews. That is what happened to 44-year-old Vince Verdecchio, a Denver lab technician who was prescribed methadone for back pain after surgery, said his wife Marianne Verdecchio.

Less than 36 hours after he filled the prescription, he was dead.

"He was only taking what was on the bottle," she said. "He took it as directed and he passed away."

#### An "extremely dangerous" dose

Some patients could die if they followed the "usual adult dosage" on methadone's package insert, said several researchers and pain doctors contacted by the Gazette-Mail.

Doses of 50 milligrams or less of methadone have killed people not accustomed to the drug, according to several studies. Researchers now recommend a starting dose of 10 milligrams a day or less for patients not used to narcotic painkillers.

But the package insert says the usual adult dose is "2.5 mg to 10 mg every three or four hours as necessary," or up to 80 milligrams a day.

The inserts are written by the drug

manufacturers and approved by the federal Food and Drug Administration.

"That's an extremely dangerous, liberal guideline," said Lynn Webster, a physician and published researcher who runs Lifetree Clinical Research and Pain Clinic in Utah. "I doubt any board-certified pain specialist would say that is a safe starting dose."

Bush administration officials have

known about the problem since at least 2003, when they convened a conference on methadone-related deaths. They paid Stewart B. Leavitt to be researcher/writer of a report based on findings from the conference.

Leavitt, a longtime methadone advocate, is editor and principal researcher/writer of two online newsletters funded by one of the world's largest

makers of methadone, Tyco/Mallinckrodt. His for-profit company owns one of the Web sites.

In a recent interview, Leavitt said methadone unfairly is blamed for overdoses that may have been caused by other drugs. He said methadone has proven effective to treat both addiction and pain.

For the past 40 years, methadone has mainly been used to treat people who are addicted to heroin and similar drugs. Methadone clinics sell daily doses of the drug, which calm cravings for heroin without getting the patients high.

Recently, doctors have begun to prescribe methadone as a cheap and effective painkiller. Those pain pills are killing more people than the liquid methadone sold by the clinics, according to medical examiners in several states and a new study of methadone overdoses in Utah.

No nationwide data shows the number of people taking methadone. But Lisa Borg, who has published methadone research in conjunction with The Rockefeller University in New York, estimated that an extremely small percentage of people who take methadone die from an overdose of it.

Negative publicity about methadone could lead to doctors and patients being afraid to use painkillers in general, Leavitt said.

"It will get to the point where you'll go to an emergency room with a broken leg and they'll give you a stick to bite on to deal with your pain," Leavitt said.

#### "His miracle drug"

Vince Verdecchio had been living with back pain for years. Doctors tried to fix his back with surgery. After one surgery in 2005, he wound up with a staph infection.

"They had to open him up a couple more times," Marianne Verdecchio said. "He had to have a home health nurse and an antibiotic bag 24 hours a day for six weeks. It was really hard on his body."  
"And the pain ..."



Verdecchio

Please See METHADONE, Page 5E

# A deadly dose

## FDA-approved language called "extremely dangerous"

By Scott Finn and Tara Tuckwiller  
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The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved a "usual adult dosage" on the package insert for methadone that several studies say could be deadly.

"The usual adult dosage is 2.5 mg to 10 mg every three or four hours as necessary," reads the drug's package insert under "For Relief of Pain."

Someone reading that label could believe it is safe for an adult to consume up to 80 milligrams of methadone a day.

But 50 milligrams of methadone or less can kill a patient not used to strong painkillers, studies say.

"Most people would die if they took 80 milligrams a day," said Lynn Webster, a pain doctor and researcher from Utah. "That's an extremely dangerous, liberal guideline."

Several other pain doctors and researchers contacted by the Sunday Gazette-Mail agreed that the dosing information potentially was dangerous.

The Gazette-Mail asked two of the biggest methadone manufacturers, Roxane Laboratories and Tyco/Mallinckrodt, about the safety of the dosing information in their package inserts.

"We really wouldn't have a comment on that," said Roxane spokeswoman Dawn Plante. "It's an FDA issue."

Tyco/Mallinckrodt spokeswoman JoAnna Scholer said in an e-mail, "The content of package inserts for pharmaceutical products like methadone is approved by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA). It serves as the official guideline for clinicians prescribing the product."

"However, the ultimate decision regarding the appropriate dosage for the patient is determined by the prescribing clinician."

An FDA spokeswoman said agency officials are aware of the issue and are working with the drug manufacturers to change the information.

But because the drug is used to treat addictions as well as pain, agency officials didn't want to scare off people who need the drug to kick heroin or other opioid drugs, said FDA spokeswoman Susan Cruzan.

"The Agency is working with the sponsors of the other methadone formulations, which are prescribed for and administered to pain patients, to make appropriate changes to the labeling for those products," Cruzan said in an e-mail.

### Potentially dangerous guidelines

Methadone is a long-acting medication. That means it takes a long time for patients to feel its effects and a long time to exit the body.

A toxic level of methadone can accumulate in the body before an overdose victim knows it. Often, the victim falls

asleep and stops breathing. By the time anyone notices, it is too late.

Methadone is more dangerous for patients who are "opioid-naive," who don't ordinarily take methadone or drugs in the same family, such as heroin, morphine or fentanyl.

Until recently, opioid-naive people rarely were prescribed methadone. But it is a cheap and effective painkiller, earning it a spot on the "preferred drug" lists of insurance companies and government health plans. Doctors are prescribing it more often for pain.

As methadone sales have risen, so have the number of overdose deaths blamed on methadone. As the deaths multiply, several researchers have recommended physicians start patients on much lower doses.

A 1988 version of one medical book says that 50 milligrams of methadone in adults and 10 milligrams in children had proven fatal, according to "Medical Toxicology — Diagnosis and Treatment of Human Poisoning."

Webster said he would prescribe no more than 20 milligrams per day to someone new to opioid drugs. Elderly or sick patients should start much lower.

In 2000, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario said to start at 7.5 milligrams per day for opioid-naive patients. A February 2006 paper published on the Web site Pain Treatment Topix, paid for by methadone-maker Tyco/Mallinckrodt, suggests no more than 5 milligrams per day for patients not accustomed to opioid drugs.

The language on the package insert isn't the only problem, Webster said. When doctors want to switch patients from one drug to another, they often rely upon conversion tables published by the drug manufacturers.

Those tables are out of date and just plain wrong, he said. The conversion tables are designed for a single dose, not for several days or weeks of use, he said. Unlike other opioid drugs, methadone builds up in the body and is slow to leave.

"I think those conversion tables are misleading and very dangerous to use," he said.

### A lower priority

In 2001, a doctor at a federally funded research institute discovered that methadone could cause potentially fatal problems with heart rhythms. But he said federal officials have been slow to respond to his warnings.

Methadone can cause cardiac arrhythmia, which may lead to blackouts and even sudden death, said Raymond Woosley at the University of Arizona's Center for Education and Research on Therapeutics.

"You can actually see the changes on the EKGs of about one in five methadone patients," he said.

Woosley began studying methadone when a friend at Sloan Kettering Hospital in New York told him that three cancer patients who were taking methadone for pain had developed heart arrhythmias.

"The drug was a half-century old, but no one had ever checked to see if it affects the heart," he said.

In fact, reports of methadone patients dying suddenly emerged soon after it began being used for addiction treatment, Woosley said. But they were drug addicts, and everyone blamed drug abuse for the deaths.

Other pain drugs, including fentanyl and morphine, don't appear to have the same effect on the heart as methadone.

Woosley has published his findings in several medical journals. He said the scientific community agrees that methadone can lead to heart complications, despite some critics in the methadone industry.

"A lot of people tried to say it didn't happen," he said. "A lot of those people run methadone clinics."

The FDA and federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration are aware of his findings, Woosley said. Last year, he helped convince the FDA to add new warnings on labels for the type of methadone given intravenously in hospitals. The combination of methadone and another drug in the intravenous fluid was particularly dangerous, he said.

Woosley is trying to convince federal regulators to strengthen the labels on other forms of methadone, too.

"The FDA has limited resources and so this is a lower priority, especially when

the treatment community is saying it's not a problem," Woosley said. "Unless something really shows up and beats on their door, they're going to continue to focus on the new drugs, not the old ones like methadone."

### Similar drug gets special warnings

In July, FDA officials sounded the alarm about another narcotic painkiller, fentanyl (Duragesic). They sent out a Public Health Advisory to warn about an increase in fentanyl-related deaths.

They also added new information to the so-called "black-box warning" for the drug — even though it causes fewer deaths than methadone, according to several medical examiners contacted by the Gazette-Mail.

The black box warns in large type of "serious or life-threatening" problems with breathing, especially within the first few days of treatment, and that using the drug with patients not accustomed to similar drugs "may lead to fatal respiratory depression."

The warning on the package insert for methadone is in smaller type and not located in a black box. It says, "The major hazards of methadone, as of other narcotic analgesics, are respiratory depression and, to a lesser degree, circulatory depression. Respiratory arrest, shock, and cardiac arrest have occurred."

The word "fatal" appears 28 times on the Duragesic package insert. It does not appear once in the methadone insert.

Cruzan, the FDA spokeswoman, said the agency is considering changes to the methadone labeling.

"The basis for the Public Health Advisory for the fentanyl patch products was that the misuse of those products frequently occurs due to the fact that they are widely prescribed, used primarily in the outpatient setting, and that the prescribers of these products and the patients who use these products are generally unfamiliar with the risks associated with their administration," Cruzan said.

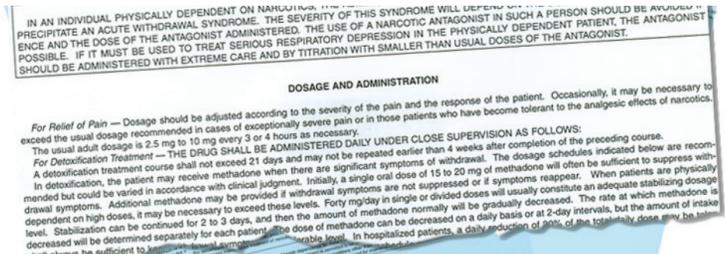
"This is not the case for the injectable or the oral concentrate formulations of methadone," which are used in hospitals and methadone clinics.

"However, as noted above, the Agency is working with the sponsors of the other methadone formulations, which are prescribed for and administered to pain patients, to make appropriate changes to the labeling for those products."

Neither Webster nor Woosley suggest methadone be taken off the market. But the warnings on the drug need to be strengthened, they said.

"There are a lot of very dangerous drugs we prescribe in medicine. I would not suggest this is not a drug to prescribe, but doctors need to know how to prescribe it safely," Webster said.

To contact staff writers Scott Finn and Tara Tuckwiller, use e-mail or call 357-4323.

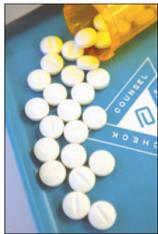




Partly cloudy  
High 74, low 49  
Details, 9A

## The Killer Cure

SECOND IN A  
THREE-PART  
SERIES



## Despite deaths, methadone prescriptions multiply

This is Part 2 of an ongoing Gazette investigation of methadone, a drug that has the unique ability to kill if you don't take it exactly as directed, and sometimes even if you do.

By Scott Finn and Tara Tuckwiler  
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Lynda Lee was recuperating in her Texas home following back surgery one day in November 2004. The 59-year-old nurse took the pain medicine her doctor had prescribed — methadone — then lay down on the couch in front of the television.



Lee

Her son found her there several hours later, dead. She had stopped breathing. The medical examiner said the cause of death was acute methadone intoxication.

"The coroner said there wasn't much in her system. It could

have just been two pills," her daughter, Alisha Regan, told the Gazette.

Across the nation, the number of people methadone helped to kill tripled in just four years, from 790 in 1999 to 2,992 in 2003, according to an analysis of death certificates conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics at the Gazette's request.

Regan wonders why so many doctors are prescribing methadone.

"There have been many deaths from methadone, and it's still a top seller," she said.

The reason, doctors and researchers say, is that methadone is cheap and effective in treating pain.

Insurance companies and state health plans are pressuring doctors to consider methadone as an alternative to more expensive painkillers, said several physicians contacted by the Gazette.

Many doctors don't know how to prescribe methadone safely, said Howard Heit, a physician from Fairfax, Va., who specializes

Please see **METHADONE, 8A**

## Federal overdose report written by industry insider

By Scott Finn and Tara Tuckwiler  
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Five years ago, Mike Blake walked into his daughter's bedroom and found his wife lying on the floor, dead from an overdose of methadone and Xanax.

The 39-year-old mother of two from Indianapolis had just started taking methadone. A doctor had prescribed it for her back pain, Mike Blake said.

"My little girl was only 2 years old when that happened," Blake said in a recent interview with the Gazette. "She doesn't have a mother now."

Around the same time, newspapers and television stations around the country started reporting on overdose victims who took methadone, like Pam Blake.

In 2003, the Bush administration responded to these deaths by

calling together the top experts on drug overdoses — doctors, researchers, and medical examiners — as well as representatives from the federal Drug Enforcement Administration, Food and Drug Administration, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

The man hired to research and write the report based on the conference, as well as a background paper for conference participants, was Stewart B. Leavitt, an addiction specialist whose work is funded by the makers of methadone.

Leavitt is editor of two Web sites that are supported entirely by one of the largest methadone manufacturers, Tyco/Mallinckrodt. Leavitt owns the for-profit company that publishes Pain Treatment Topix and he is editor of Addiction Treatment Fo-

Please see **LEAVITT, 8A**

# 21 Shiites gunned down

## Teenage students among victims dragged from vans

By Patrick Quinn  
The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Masked gunmen stopped two minivans carrying students north of Baghdad on Sunday, ordered the passengers off, separated Shiites from Sunni Arabs, and killed the 21 Shiites "in the name of Islam," a witness said.

In predominantly Shiite southern Basra, police hunting for militants stormed a Sunni mosque early Sunday, just hours after a car bombing. The ensuing firefight killed nine.

The two attacks dealt a blow to Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's pledge to curb sectarian violence. Again Sunday, he failed to reach consensus among Iraq's ethnic and sectarian parties on candidates for Interior and Defense minister — posts he must fill to implement his ambitious plan to take control of Iraq's security from U.S.-led forces within 18 months.

Violence linked to Shiite and Sunni animosity has grown increasingly worse since Feb. 22, when bombs ravaged the golden dome of a revered Shiite mosque in predominantly Sunni Samarra.

Sectarian tensions have run particularly high in Baghdad, Basra and Diyala province, a mixed Sunni-Shiite region. And Sunday's attacks came just days after terrorist mastermind Abu Musab al-Zarqawi renewed his call for Sunnis to take up arms against Shiites, whom he often vilifies as infidels.

In the minibus ambush, a car and an SUV stopped the vehicles near the town of Qara Tappah, about 75 miles northeast of Baghdad and near Diyala province, electrician Haqi Ismail, 48, told The Associated Press.

Ismail said he had been driving his pickup behind the vans and was stopped, too. About 15 masked men wearing traditional robes known as a dishdashas forced everyone out of the vehicles, he said.

"They asked us to show our IDs, and then instructed us to stand in a line, separating the Sunni from the Shiite due to the IDs and also due to the faces," said Ismail, a Shiite Kurd.

He said the gunmen ordered the Shiites to lie down and, before they opened fire one shouted, "On behalf of Islam, today we will dig a mass grave for you. You are traitors."

Ismail said he was wounded but did not



AP photo

A victim's body is removed from the hospital in Kalar, Iraq, on Sunday.

move.

"One of the gunmen kicked me to be sure that I was dead," he said, speaking from his hospital bed in Sulaimaniyah, north of Qara Tappah.

Two of the victims were high school students, ages 17 and 18, and nine were students at al-Yarmouk University in Baquba, ages 21-22, said Qara Tappah's mayor, Serwan Shokir. The rest were men in their mid- to late 30s, who worked as laborers or for the power company, the mayor said.

The Basra violence — the car bomb Sat-

urday and mosque raid early Sunday — came days after al-Maliki declared a state of emergency in the city, vowing to crack down with an "iron fist" on gangs fighting for power.

Basra police surrounded the al-Arab mosque just after midnight Saturday, tipped off that militants holed up inside had opened fire. Also, Iraqi forces had found two vehicles packed with explosives near the mosque, similar to the car bomb used to attack a crowded market, killing 28 people.

Please see **IRAQ, 9A**

## Whittaker battles Putnam dad, N.J. casino

### Father of dead teen wants records of Powerball winner in Atlantic City

By Charles Shumaker  
cshumaker@wvgazette.com

WINFIELD — A Putnam County father's civil lawsuit over his son's overdose death in a home owned by Powerball winner Jack Whittaker involves the casinos of Atlantic City, N.J., according to state and federal court filings.

Lawyers for James Tribble, the father of Jesse Joe Tribble, have subpoenaed surveillance video and records from the casinos frequented by multi-millionaire Whittaker.

In 2003 and 2004, Whittaker often went to casinos in New Jersey, as is shown in a lawsuit filed in May 2005 against him by Boardwalk Regency Corp., the parent company of Caesars Atlantic City.

Casino officials allege that Whittaker's \$1.5 million in



Whittaker

checks to create a credit line at Caesars bounced. In court filings in the case, casino officials allege that Whittaker signed 21 checks in July and August 2004 for either \$50,000 or \$100,000 amounts. City National Bank voided several of the checks because the account had been closed and voided others for unknown reasons.

The casino alleges that Whittaker owes them the money to repay the credit line.

But in his counterclaims against the casino, Whittaker says he owes nothing because of financial agreements with

the casino.

According to filings, Whittaker and the casino agreed on a 10 percent credit on his losses at the casino because he was a repeat customer of the hotel and casino. He also was due royalties from revenues from a "Cowboy Jack" slot machine he developed and had manufactured to focus on the cowboy hat he often wore, according to the filings.

Although the cases are unrelated, lawyers for Tribble appear to be mapping Whittaker's whereabouts.

Part of the wrongful death case likely will depend on what people knew about where Whittaker went and what his granddaughter did, based on court filings.

Tom Peyton, one of Tribble's lawyers, subpoenaed records that would show Whittaker and

a woman named Christina Bush registered at the casinos and hotels in 2004.

Jesse Tribble, 18, died after overdosing on drugs in September 2004.

Tribble blames Whittaker for his son's death because the lottery winner's teenage granddaughter, the late Brandi Lasha Bragg, was given "unfettered" access to his Scott Depot home and was provided with large sums of money. That led Bragg to drug use that ultimately killed her and Tribble, according to the lawsuit.

Bragg, 17, died of a drug overdose a few months later, according to her death certificate.

Whittaker denies that he or his granddaughter should be blamed. He said Jesse Tribble

Please see **WHITTAKER, 9A**

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**U.S. war dead**  
Iraq 2,477  
Elsewhere 292  
Sources: AP/Department of Defense



Gazette photo by CHIP ELLIS

## Symphony Sunday smiles

Rozee Bell fashions a balloon critter for Maria Cevallos, 6, of Charleston during Symphony Sunday festivities on Sunday. The West Virginia Symphony and a fireworks display capped off the daylong event on the University of Charleston's riverfront lawn.

# METHADONE

Continued from 1A

in treating pain and addiction. "Insurance companies are forcing certain doctors to prescribe medications they don't understand," Heit said in a telephone interview. "The companies are looking more to their bottom lines as opposed to being advocates for patients."

Americans are consuming more methadone than ever before — almost 10 times more last year than a decade before, according to data obtained from the federal Drug Enforcement Administration.

The companies that make methadone have seen their revenues rise, also. They have spent some of those millions on Washington, D.C., lobbyists.

One company, Tyco/Mallinckrodt, also provides grants to fund two Web sites edited by Stewart Leavitt, a methadone advocate and researcher who helped write the government's response to methadone overdose deaths (see accompanying story).

A Tyco spokeswoman referred a reporter to Leavitt when asked about methadone's safety.

Leavitt said the responsibility for methadone overdose deaths lies not with the companies that make it or the government that regulates it, but with doctors and patients.

"Ultimately, this is the individual responsibility of the citizen," he said. "At some point, people have to stand up and take responsibility for their actions."

## Yanked in the '70s

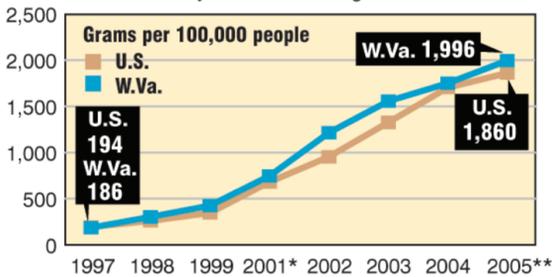
Lynda Lee was a drug rehabilitation nurse for 25 years before her back pain forced her into temporary disability. Regan said her mother was more likely to try to battle through pain without taking her painkiller than to double up on a dose.

"She was one that would never even take an aspirin," Regan said.

Lee had been taking morphine before her doctor switched her to methadone. Regan said she doesn't know why her mother was switched because the morphine

## Methadone use on the rise

Americans and West Virginians are taking about 10 times more methadone today than a decade ago.



\*Data for 2000 not available. \*\*Estimate, based on first six months.

SOURCE: Federal Drug Enforcement Administration

Gazette graphic by BRENDA PINNELL

was working well, except that methadone was considerably cheaper.

After her mother died, Regan started looking for information on the drug.

"I never searched methadone online until Mom passed away," she said. "I couldn't believe all the deaths I found."

Methadone has been a controversial drug from its very beginning. At one point in the 1970s, the federal government was so worried about its safety that it yanked methadone from retail pharmacy shelves.

At the time, methadone wasn't prescribed much for pain. German researchers had invented methadone during World War II, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved it as a painkiller in 1947.

It gained a reputation as toxic and addictive soon after it hit the market and fell into disuse.

By the 1960s, researchers discovered methadone was good for something else: subduing heroin cravings. The FDA approved that new use in 1972 — but it simultaneously decided that methadone should no longer be given for pain outside of a hospital, saying there was "a lack of substantial evidence that methadone is safe and effective" as it was being used.

The American Pharmaceutical Association filed a federal lawsuit, and by July 1976 the FDA was forced to reverse its rule. Methadone was back on phar-

macy shelves as a painkiller.

But methadone was not used widely for pain until the 1990s. Pain doctors and the drug industry argued that untold millions of Americans suffered from untreated pain. Doctors should be less afraid to prescribe powerful painkillers to subdue their agony, they said.

One of the most popular narcotic painkillers was OxyContin, which was extremely effective and powerful. But in the hollows of West Virginia and elsewhere, drug abusers discovered it could be crushed and snorted or dissolved in water and injected for a heroin-like high.

Soon, "hillbilly heroin" earned its own bad reputation. Doctors and insurance companies looked around for alternatives. Methadone, relatively cheap and harder to abuse, became a fallback drug of choice.

## Pressure to prescribe

Methadone is much cheaper than other narcotics. A one-month supply (90 pills of five milligrams each) costs about \$8, compared with \$80 for generic morphine or \$100 for OxyContin, according to First DataBank, a national reference of prescription drug prices.

Insurance companies, workers' compensation programs and state health programs like Medicaid all are pushing methadone over more expensive alternatives, said Lynn Webster, a pain researcher and physician

from Utah.

Webster told the Gazette he feels pressured to prescribe methadone by insurers.

"I've had insurance companies deny payments for OxyContin because they feel it is not indicated. Or they say they aren't going to pay for enough of the drug to be effective, so we can't control pain at the amount they authorize," Webster said. "We can either prescribe methadone or nothing at all."

Several states, including West Virginia, have added methadone to their preferred drug lists. That makes it easier for doctors to prescribe than other drugs that require prior approval from the state.

Federal programs are asking doctors to prescribe methadone, too.

"If there are two medications out there that are equally effective, the Veterans Administration will choose the less expensive alternative every time," said James Toombs, a pain researcher and physician at a VA hospital in Columbia, Mo., in a telephone interview.

## Sales soar for manufacturers

The companies that make methadone have seen huge increases in sales as the drug's popularity has risen.

One of the world's largest makers of opioid pain drugs is Tyco, the same company whose top executives were jailed for

looting millions from the company. Company officials agreed to pay a \$50 million fine to settle allegations of inflated company earnings.

Tyco also employed Republican lobbyist Jack Abramoff to help it avoid taxes and get government contracts, according to published reports. In January, Abramoff pleaded guilty to federal charges of fraud, tax evasion and conspiracy to bribe public officials.

Tyco got into the methadone-making business in 2000, when it bought a company called Mallinckrodt Inc.

The revenues generated by Tyco/Mallinckrodt increased 22 percent between 2001 and 2005, according to U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission filings, from \$7 billion to \$9.5 billion.

The company makes many drugs, mostly generic. In several SEC filings, company officials credit some of their increased profits to the sale of narcotics like methadone.

In just one year, the amount of methadone and other narcotics the company sold jumped 30 percent, according to a 2000 company report.

Another large manufacturer of methadone, Roxane Laboratories of Columbus, Ohio, has helped boost sales for its owner, a German conglomerate called Boehringer Ingelheim Inc.

The German company's net revenues grew by 42 percent be-

tween 2001 and 2005, from about \$8.6 billion to \$12.2 billion, according to company reports.

Those companies are investing some of that money in Washington, D.C., lobbyists. Between 1998 and 2004, Tyco paid lobbyists \$4.1 million and Boehringer Ingelheim paid lobbyists \$860,000, according to the non-partisan Center for Public Integrity.

Tyco/Mallinckrodt sponsors continuing education courses and information sessions at industry conferences to provide doctors and pharmacists with up-to-date information about methadone, company spokeswoman JoAnna Scholer told the Gazette.

Mallinckrodt has supported the Addiction Treatment Forum, which Leavitt edits, since 1992, and Leavitt's other Web site, Pain Treatment Topix, since before it went online in January.

Leavitt said he is afraid bad publicity about methadone will scare doctors and patients who need to use it. He said educational efforts such as his Web site are the best way to reduce accidental overdose deaths.

Some family members of methadone overdose victims want to go further. Some say they want the drug locked up in secure boxes. They want the warnings on the drug's package insert, which the FDA approved, to be stronger.

Regan said the drug shouldn't be given outside of hospitals, if at all.

"If they could take it off the market, I'd be all for it. I think they could come up with something else for the drug rehab centers," she said. "Because I know it's taken a lot of loved ones from families that didn't deserve it."

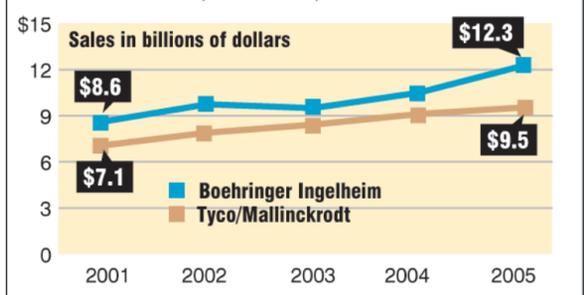
Regan's mother had four children, four grandchildren and a great-grandchild.

"She was a wonderful person," Regan said. "She would give anyone the shirt off her back or everything in the refrigerator ... I don't know, everybody seemed to love her."

"I just wish she was still here." To contact staff writers Scott Finn and Tara Tuckwiller, use e-mail or call 357-4323 or 348-5189.

## Record sales for methadone makers

Two large methadone manufacturers have earned record revenues as consumption of their painkillers rises.



SOURCES: Company annual reports and U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission filings

Gazette graphic by BRENDA PINNELL

# LEAVITT

Continued from 1A

rum, a Web site that advocates the use of methadone to treat addiction.

Leavitt said he raised the issue of a potential conflict of interest with Bush administration officials before he took the job. They saw no problem with hiring someone paid by a methadone company to write the report about a conference on methadone deaths, he said.

"They took a look at my work on Addiction Treatment Forum and realized we always took a balanced approach based on the evidence," he said in a telephone interview.

A SAMHSA official said Leavitt was hired by a contractor and not directly by them. He saw no problem with the arrangement, however.

"We do not direct our contractors who to hire," said Robert Lubran, director of the Division of Pharmacologic Therapies at SAMHSA. "We might have made a recommendation."

Mike Blake questions how someone so closely tied to the makers of methadone could be entrusted with such important work.

"Some of this stuff is just so pathetic," he said. "When they're trying to figure out the real answers to things, they go about it the wrong way."

## 'What the hell are you doing?'

Bruce Goldberger was one of the first to sound the alarm about the increasing number of deaths involving methadone. He is director of the Forensic Toxicology Laboratory at the University of Florida.

In October 2002, Goldberger issued a press release about methadone deaths in his state. Within days, he received a phone call from an official at SAMHSA, he said.

The caller did not express concern about the overdose deaths, Goldberger said. Instead, he worried that the publicity could damage methadone-treatment facilities, which the agency regulates. "He asked, 'What the hell are you doing? Do you have any idea how this will affect what we do?'" Goldberger said.

But the story about overdose deaths was starting to get out. National and local media focused on what was seen as the most likely culprit — drug treatment programs, known as methadone clinics. The clinics allowed some patients to leave with "take-home" doses of liquid methadone so they don't have to return every day. Some of those doses could be sold on the street.

In May 2003, the federal government gathered experts like Goldberger and Leavitt for a conference on "methadone-associated mortality."

Conference participants con-



Photo courtesy of Mike Blake

**Pam Blake, a 39-year-old mother of two, died of an accidental methadone overdose in 2001. Her husband, Mike Blake, says doctors are not being careful enough when they prescribe methadone.**

cluded that most overdose deaths were caused by methadone pain pills, not liquid methadone from drug treatment clinics, according to the report written by Leavitt.

That conclusion was reflected in the media release SAMHSA sent to news outlets after the conference: "Methadone deaths not linked to misuse of methadone from treatment centers."

"Methadone continues to be a safe, effective treatment for addiction to heroin or prescription painkillers," said Westley Clark, director of the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment at SAMHSA, in the media release. "While deaths involving methadone increased, experiences in several states show that addiction treatment programs are not the culprits."

## Little progress made

Experts at the conference came up with several recommendations to reduce methadone deaths. Three years later, little progress has been made to meet those goals, Goldberger and Leavitt said.

The report recommended that the federal government create a system to track drug overdose deaths as they happen, but there is no nationwide tracking effort today. The Drug Enforcement Agency has started a pilot program in three cities and four states, including West Virginia, called the Drug Related Death Reporting System.

Also, the report calls for a uniform definition of a methadone-related death and standards that toxicologists could use in testing. The new standards still are being developed, Lubran said.

The report also calls for more education of physicians and patients about the dangers of methadone. Leavitt says his newest Web site, Pain Treatment Topix, publishes information for doctors about safely prescribing methadone, such as one paper on dangerous drug interactions.

"They tell us that paper has saved lives," Leavitt said.

A drug interaction may have killed Pam Blake, said her husband, Mike.

Years ago, she was in a car wreck that left her with disabling injuries to her back and brain stem.

Her back "never healed right," Mike Blake said. "The doctor said maybe they could fix it."

She had two back surgeries in one year, and then went to a pain management clinic.

"This was a woman who had a contusion on her brain stem. Her memory was bad," he said. "The doctor sent her home with 50 methadone pills and some Xanax."

Xanax is a benzodiazepine, a type of drug that increases the risk of overdose when combined with opioids such as methadone.

She took the methadone for three days.

"She kept asking me and my stepson and my mother-in-law, 'Can you remember if I took my medication?'" Blake said.

On June 19, 2001, "I was with her right up until we went to bed that night," he said. "There was nothing unusual in her behavior."

"For some reason I got up in the middle of the night ..."

His wife had gone into their daughter's room. She was already dead.

"I tried to give her CPR before they got there," Blake said. "We called an ambulance. They tried to resuscitate her with an electric defibrillator."

"It just happened so fast." He thinks his wife accidentally took more methadone than she was supposed to.

"There were still a whole lot of pills left," he said. "She might have taken a couple too many."

"I would like to see people not be able to get a whole bottle at one time ... There's got to be a different way in pain management of dealing with this."

To contact staff writers Scott Finn and Tara Tuckwiller, use e-mail or call 357-4323 or 348-5189.

## The Killer Cure

A THREE-PART SERIES



**SUNDAY PART 1**  
The number of deaths blamed on the prescription drug methadone more than tripled in America in just four years.

**TODAY PART 2**  
Insurance companies pressure doctors to prescribe methadone to patients. Meanwhile, profits soar for methadone makers.

**TUESDAY PART 3**  
Government officials in some states and abroad are coming up with strategies to prevent methadone overdose deaths.

# 3 YEARS

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## The Killer Cure

THIRD IN A  
THREE-PART  
SERIES



### 'ONE PILL CAN KILL'

#### Education, surveillance can prevent methadone overdose deaths

This is Part 3 of an ongoing Gazette investigation regarding methadone, a drug that has a unique ability to kill if you don't take it exactly as directed, and sometimes even if you do.

By Scott Finn and Tara Tuckwiller  
sfinn@wvgazette.com  
tara@wvgazette.com

On Memorial Day weekend in 2004, a traveling fair came to the small town of Oconto Falls, Wis. Sixteen-year-old Josh Engebretsen and three of his friends decided to go.

His mother, Sue, remembers the night. Everything seemed so normal. Her son called before his 9 p.m. curfew, asked if he could stay at his friend's house. The boys went home, sat up talking until 3 a.m.

Engebretsen died in his sleep that night. During the boys' night of fun at the fair, another local teen offered them some pills. It was methadone that his mother was prescribed for pain. Engebretsen took two.

The number of people like Engebretsen that methadone has helped to kill has multiplied — from 790 in 1999 to 2,992 in 2003, according to an analysis of death certificates conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics for the Charleston Gazette.

Some government officials are responding. Thousands of miles apart, they have developed the same solutions — keep track of who is being prescribed methadone and who is dying from it, and educate doctors, pharmacists and patients about the drug's dangers.

#### Two 10-milligram pills

Catherine Sanford, a North Carolina epidemiologist, watched

the number of deaths caused by methadone in her state rise from seven in 1997 to 243 in 2004.

"It was shocking," she said in a telephone interview. "We couldn't believe what we were seeing."

In 2002, Sanford went to her boss, Carmen Hooker Odom, secretary of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. Odom called together a task force of state experts to develop a plan.

Something similar happened on the national level in 2003, when the federal government convened a conference about methadone overdose deaths. But few of the conference's recommendations have been implemented, experts who were involved in the conference told the Gazette.

In North Carolina, officials set up a special "working group" to make sure their plan was implemented. Every three months, representatives from law enforcement, public health, doctors and pharmacist groups met to figure out which goals were being met and which were not.

Since then, the state Legislature passed a law to create a statewide database to keep track of potentially addictive and easily abused prescription drugs such as methadone.

The database is designed to stop "doctor shoppers" — patients who go from doctor to doctor, piling up multiple prescriptions for the same drug.

Pharmacists and doctors are being asked to tell their patients to keep the drug in a lockbox or other safe place.

"We're not trying to demonize methadone. But if we don't make it safe to use these drugs, they might be taken away. We don't want that to happen," Sanford said.

Sanford closely tracks methadone overdose deaths in her state. Because of the state's surveillance system, she noticed when more and more teenagers began dying from methadone.

Please see **METHADONE, 9A**

## Severance tax upheld

### U.S. court refuses tax challenge from coal, steel

By Lawrence Messina  
The Associated Press

The U.S. Supreme Court said Monday it will not review last year's ruling by West Virginia's highest court upholding the constitutionality of the state's coal severance taxes.

Without comment, the U.S. justices refused an appeal from coal and steel companies challenging the taxes.

"The odds of getting the court to hear any case are long," Ned Rose, a lawyer for the companies, said Monday. "We'll just proceed with that."

The state Supreme Court ruled in December that the taxes did not illegally interfere with interstate commerce, as the companies argued. That ruling upheld a similar finding by Kanawha Circuit Judge Tod Kaufman.

The energy market boom has made West Virginia's coal severance taxes an important revenue source. Officials estimate their revenues increased 25 percent last year to more than \$270 million. The state plans to rely on them for \$320 million during the budget year

that begins July 1. West Virginia's 55 counties and 234 municipalities receive 7 percent of severance taxes.

The state taxes several natural resources as they leave the ground, though coal accounts for about 90 percent of the revenue. The coal severance taxes include two that are calculated as a percentage of the coal's value, both mined and processed, and three taxes that are assessed as fixed amounts on each ton mined.

The legal challenge focused on coal exports, which make up

about 10 percent of West Virginia's total coal sales. State officials said eliminating the taxes on exports would have cost the state between \$40 million and \$50 million in future annual revenue.

Officials also feared an adverse ruling would have forced them to refund an estimated \$500 million to the 11 companies that brought the challenge.

"This is a great day for West Virginia," acting state Tax Commissioner Virgil Helton said, citing the potential revenue loss.

The case was U.S. Steel Mining Co. et. al. v. Helton, 05-1268.

## Bush pushes for marriage amendment as debate begins



Opponents of the proposed amendment demonstrate outside the U.S. Capitol Monday.

## Measure is likely to fail again

By Deb Riechmann  
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Cheered by conservative supporters, President Bush gave a push Monday to a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage as the Senate opened debate on an emotional, election-year measure that has little chance of passing.

"Our policies should aim to strengthen families, not undermine them," Bush said in a speech. "And changing the definition of marriage would undermine the family structure."

All Senate Democrats, except Ben Nelson of Nebraska, oppose the amendment, and critics say Bush's efforts are primarily aimed at energizing conservative voters for the November elections. Together with



A backer of the amendment shows his support while listening to President Bush Monday.

moderate Republicans, the Democrats are expected to block a yes-or-no vote, killing the measure for the year.

Sen. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., who sponsored the measure, acknowledged that politics played a part in the timing of

■ Editorial, 4A

the debate, but for a different reason: to force senators to take a stand and answer for their votes on the campaign trail.

"We ought to have a vote on the amendment every year," Allard said.

The amendment would prohibit states from recognizing same-sex marriages. To become law, it would need two-thirds support in the Senate and House, and then would have to be ratified by at least 38 state legislatures.

Sen. Hillary Clinton said the discussion of gay marriage in Congress this week is a priority for the White House and the

Please see **MARRIAGE, 9A**

## Court to rule on school race issue

By Gina Holland  
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court agreed Monday to decide whether skin color can be considered in assigning children to public schools, reopening the issue of affirmative action.

The announcement puts a contentious social topic on the national landscape in an election year, and tests the conservatism of President Bush's two new justices.

The outcome could mark a new chapter for a court that famously banned racial segregation in public schools in

Brown v. Board of Education in 1954.

Since then, race questions have been hugely divisive, both for the court and the public.

Three years ago, more than 5,000 people demonstrated outside as the justices considered whether public universities could select students based at least in part on race. Justice Sandra Day O'Connor broke a tie to allow it in a limited way.

The court's new interest is in public schools, far more sweeping than universities. And O'Connor is gone, replaced by conservative Justice Samuel Al-

Please see **RACE, 9A**

### Bogus bills show up in Kanawha

TODAY, 1C



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### U.S. war dead

Iraq 2,477  
Elsewhere 292

Sources: AP/Department of Defense

Stories, 4C

## Arrest warrant issued for Clendenin mayor

By Andrew Clevenger  
aclevenger@wvgazette.com

Clendenin Mayor Bob Ore allegedly obstructed two Clendenin police officers when they were trying to make an arrest, according to a criminal complaint in Kanawha County Magistrate Court.

On Monday evening, Ore tried to get Clendenin Town Council members to fire the officer who filed the complaint against him, according to one councilman. Council members unanimously refused, said Councilman T.J. Edmonds.

Chief Magistrate Kim Aaron signed a warrant Saturday for Ore's arrest on one charge of obstructing a police officer.

Ore said Monday afternoon that he had not been served with the warrant, and declined to comment until he had been served.

According to the criminal complaint, Clendenin police officers C.L. Burkhamer and W.S. Hunter went to a home on North Point Drive on April 20 to serve warrants for domestic battery on Terry Lee Peck and his girlfriend, Misti Dawn Sexton.

When the officers arrived, Peck handed a cordless phone to Burkhamer, according to the complaint. Ore was on the line, and asked the officer if he was

Please see **WARRANT, 9A**

# WEATHER

Today			Wednesday			Thursday			Friday			Saturday		
MOSTLY SUNNY			PARTLY CLOUDY			PARTLY CLOUDY			PARTLY CLOUDY			MOSTLY SUNNY		
HIGH 78° LOW 49°			HIGH 80° LOW 57°			HIGH 81° LOW 62°			HIGH 77° LOW 57°			HIGH 79° LOW 55°		

■ Today's forecast and Monday's temperatures to 8 p.m.

City	Hi	Lo	Fcst	City	Hi	Lo	Fcst
Anchorage	59	40	PCldy	Miami Beach	90	73	Clr
Atlanta	81	57	Cir	Nashville	81	57	Clr
Boston	70	56	PCldy	New Orleans	91	72	PCldy
Charlotte, N.C.	77	55	PCldy	New York City	75	62	PCldy
Chicago	80	58	PCldy	Orlando	92	69	Clr
Cincinnati	78	52	Cir	Phoenix	110	84	PCldy
Cleveland	76	55	Cir	Pittsburgh	74	53	PCldy
Dallas-Ft. Worth	96	75	PCldy	Raleigh-Durham	76	55	PCldy
Denver	90	56	PCldy	Richmond	75	53	PCldy
Detroit	79	56	Cir	Roanoke	75	53	PCldy
Elkins	69	45	PCldy	Salt Lake City	86	60	Cir
Honolulu	86	72	Cir	San Diego	72	63	PCldy
Houston	92	71	Cir	San Francisco	68	54	Cir
Jacksonville	90	63	PCldy	Seattle	68	52	PCldy
Las Vegas	107	81	PCldy	Tampa-St. Pts	89	72	Cir
Lexington	78	54	Cir	Washington, D.C.	75	61	PCldy
Los Angeles	81	64	PCldy	Wilmington, Del.	76	56	PCldy

■ Monday's weather around the world:

City	Hi	Lo	Wea	City	Hi	Lo	Wea
Amsterdam	60	46	PCldy	Mexico City	68	53	Rain
Athens	80	62	PCldy	Montreal	68	53	Cldy
Baghdad	118	84	Cir	Moscow	62	53	PCldy
Beijing	85	66	Cir	Nassau	88	75	Rain
Berlin	57	48	PCldy	New Delhi	95	77	PCldy
Bermuda	80	72	Rain	Oslo	61	42	Cir
Cairo	101	74	Cir	Pais de Janeiro	77	64	Cir
Calgary	68	40	PCldy	Rome	73	53	Rain
Dublin	70	49	PCldy	San Juan	90	77	Rain
Hong Kong	87	82	Rain	Seoul	77	60	PCldy
Jerusalem	94	66	PCldy	Stockholm	62	44	Rain
London	74	51	Rain	Tokyo	69	62	PCldy
Madrid	86	53	Cir	Toronto	68	58	Rain
Manila	89	76	Rain				

### Today's weather

Charleston: 78° | 49°

Fronts: Cold, Warm, Stationary

Pressure: Low, High

Legend: Cloudy, Partly Cloudy, Showers, Thunderstorms, Rain, Flurries, Snow, Ice

### MONDAY'S WEATHER IN CHARLESTON:

■ Temperatures: High.....73, Low.....50, High.....99 (1935), Low.....42 (1988)

■ Precipitation: Last 24 hours at 8 p.m. ....none, Month total...0.19", 2006 total...12.66"

■ Highest wind: 10 mph NW

■ Today's sun: Rise.....6:03 a.m., Set .....8:47 p.m.



## Jim Barach's Outlook

After areas of dense morning fog, skies will be partly cloudy today, with a nice warmup on the way. The high will make it to 78 degrees. Wednesday will be nearly identical, with a high of 79. A weak weather system could set off a few showers or an isolated afternoon thunderstorm under mostly cloudy skies Thursday.



Watch WCHS-Fox 11 Storm Team Weather with chief meteorologist Jim Barach, Brian Shields and Karen Wynne.

## Column 1

Inside information

### LOTTERIES

**Monday, June 5, 2006**

**West Virginia:**  
Daily 3 — 822  
Daily 4 — 6449  
Cash 25 — 1-2-11-16-17-23

**Ohio:**  
Night Pick 3 — 518  
Night Pick 4 — 5798  
Day Pick 3 — 025  
Day Pick 4 — 1185  
Rolling Cash 5 — 5-8-12-17-18

### CORRECTION

A listing in the On File column in Monday's Gazette misspelled the name of Melissa S. Czeck, who has filed for divorce from Frederick N. Czeck.

### OMISSION

A news release for the WVU Classic Fashion show omitted Ivor's on Capitol and Lee streets as being among the stores supplying fashions for the benefit luncheon and fashion show at 11:30 a.m. Thursday in the ballroom of the Charleston Marriott.

### ROAD CHECKS

Public Service Commission Safety Enforcement Officers will conduct a 72-hour mandatory commercial motor vehicle road check from 12:01 a.m. today through 12:01 a.m. Friday at the Coopers Rock Weigh Station on Interstate 68 and the Bluestone Rest Area on the West Virginia Turnpike. All commercial motor vehicles will be required to pull over for possible inspection to ensure compliance with federal safety regulations. Roving patrols will also conduct inspections on commercial vehicles traveling other highways in the state.

### DRUG TIP LINES

The Kanawha County Sheriff's Department operates a methamphetamine hot line. To report a tip, call 357-4693.  
Putnam County's tip line is 586-0263.

### GETTING IT RIGHT

The Charleston Gazette corrects errors of fact in this space. If you spot an error, please call Patty Tompkins at 348-5190.

### READERS' VOICE

What's bothering you? What do you think?  
Express your opinion on any subject you wish by calling Readers' Voice at 357-4451  
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### GETTING INTO PRINT

Have a news tip? Got a story idea? Call us:  
City desk — 348-5100  
Environment — Ken Ward, 348-1702  
Business news — Joe Morris, 348-5179  
Putnam news — Charles Shumaker, 348-1240

### LIBRARY HOURS

The Charleston Newspapers library is open to the public from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesday through Friday. The library is on the second floor of the CN building, 1001 Virginia St. E.  
The library has copies of the Gazette on microfilm from 1895 to 1985 and on the computer from 1985 to present.  
For information, call librarian Ron Miller at 348-4888.

## METHADONE

Continued from 1A

In response, the state is developing an educational campaign on the dangers of prescription drugs, especially methadone.

Teenagers are being told in explicit language that taking methadone to get high, even in small doses, can be deadly.

"One pill can kill" is one of our slogans," Sanford said. Or two pills, in Josh Engbregtsen's case — two 10-milligram pills.

Sue Engbregtsen had never heard of methadone before her son's death. She had to research it on the Internet.

"It's just so scary, because it is a tiny little white pill," she told the Gazette. "Think about two aspirin — that's 500 milligrams. You look at that tiny little pill that says '10' on the top and think, 'How dangerous can that be?' From a kid's perspective — or an adult."

Even the local newspaper assumed he must have downed the pills with alcohol, she said.

"The papers here said he had been partying and drinking," she said. "But the toxicology reports showed nothing but the methadone."

### Not in our family

About 10 years ago, England was experiencing its own epidemic of overdose deaths involving methadone.

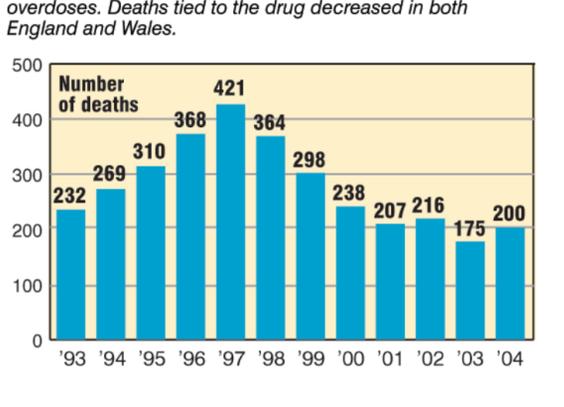
English health officials tackled the problem head-on and cut in half the number of methadone overdoses in seven years.

In 1997, methadone helped to kill 421 people in England and Wales, according to the British Office for National Statistics. By 2004, that number had fallen to 200.

In 2000, in a national report on "Reducing Drug Related Deaths," methadone was the only drug to merit a whole chapter. "If allowed to continue unchecked, the num-

## Methadone deaths drop in England

British officials launched a campaign targeted at methadone overdoses. Deaths tied to the drug decreased in both England and Wales.



### What you can do

Methadone is an effective painkiller and treatment for drug addiction. To avoid accidental overdose, experts advise caution:

**Never take methadone unless** it is prescribed to you. Even people who are accustomed to other opioids (OxyContin, fentanyl, etc.) can die if they take methadone, which behaves differently in the body.

**If methadone is prescribed** to you, make sure your physician is properly trained and experienced in methadone therapy. The doctor must be familiar with methadone's unique properties and how it interacts with other drugs.

**"Start low and go slow"** is the rule for this long-acting drug. Do not take more doses than prescribed. Even after methadone's effects seem to have worn off, it is still depressing the respiratory system.

**Watch out for other drugs.** Several drugs can intensify methadone's effects and cause overdose. Before you take methadone, ask a doctor experienced with the drug whether your other prescriptions are safe to take with it.

**Lock up your methadone.** If consumed by children or other family members, or stolen and sold on the street, it can kill.

Source: Dr. Lynn Webster, Lifetree Clinical Research and Pain Clinic, Salt Lake City, Utah

## WARRANT

Continued from 1A

there to arrest Peck and Sexton, Burkhamer wrote in the complaint.

Burkhamer told the mayor that he had obtained warrants from Kanawha Magistrate Tim Halloran.

"Mr. Ore then advised me that I didn't need to arrest these two individuals, especially at 11:30 at night," Burkhamer wrote in the complaint. "He then stated ... that these two are not hardened criminals."

## RACE

Continued from 1A

ito.

The justices will hear appeals from a Seattle parents group and a Kentucky mom, who argue that race restrictions improperly penalize white students.

"This is going to reach into the homes and thinking of 100 percent of students," said Doug Kmiec, a Pepperdine University law professor and former Reagan administration lawyer. "This is

Burkhamer informed Ore that Peck and Sexton were accused of abusing a 4-year-old girl, according to the complaint.

"[Ore] then stated, 'You heard me officer, do not arrest them,'" and hung up, according to the complaint.

Afraid of retaliation from the mayor, Burkhamer told Peck and Sexton to turn themselves in at magistrate court first thing in the morning, according to the complaint. Peck and Sexton were arrested the next day, April 21, and released after they each posted \$250 cash bond.

Burkhamer could not be reached for comment on Monday.

not quite at the level of Brown v. Board, but it will be argued in the style of that case.

Justices will look at the modern-era classroom, no longer under court desegregation orders but in some places still using remnants of those policies.

At its heart, the court will consider whether school leaders can promote racial diversity without violating the Constitution's guarantee against discrimination.

The court's announcement that it will take up the cases this fall provides the first sign of an aggressiveness by the court under

cialists there:

▲ Asked a group of experts for advice on how methadone can be safely prescribed, then distributed the guidelines to all general practitioners, emergency workers and drug treatment centers.

▲ Set up a system to track drug overdose deaths as they happened.

▲ Trained coroners and local law enforcement officers to spot overdose deaths.

▲ Got more people into drug treatment. Although methadone was a leading cause of overdose deaths in the U.K., officials said proper methadone treatment had the potential to stop some of those deaths. Officials poured money into drug treatment programs, to make them more accessible and effective.

▲ Taught the general public how to prevent drug overdoses. They produced videos, posters and wallet-sized cards, with instructions on how to avoid overdoses, how to detect them, and how to do first aid to stop them from being deadly.

People cannot fight a problem unless they confront it head on, British Health Minister Hazel Blears said in a 2001 news release.

"We are determined to make a real difference by focusing our initial work on overdoses from heroin and methadone," she said.

Sue Engbregtsen also is trying to educate parents and teenagers about the dangers of methadone.

Three months ago, she created a Web site to tell the story of her son's death. She posted photos of her son from the last few months of his life: sitting beside his dad at Christmas, posing with his older brother Eric and the family's two dogs, hugging his grandma on the porch.

"It's been devastating," she said. "People ask me how many kids I have, and when I have to tell them I lost my younger son ... right away they're going to jump to conclusions — he's some drug addict. I'm constantly de-

## The Killer Cure

A THREE-PART SERIES



### SUNDAY PART 1

The number of deaths blamed on the prescription drug methadone more than tripled in America in just four years.

### MONDAY PART 2

Insurance companies pressure doctors to prescribe methadone to patients. Meanwhile, profits soar for methadone makers.

### TODAY PART 3

Government officials in some states and abroad are coming up with strategies to prevent methadone overdose deaths.

fending him to people who didn't know him. I don't have to do that to the people who did.

"We never ever thought in a million years that something like this would happen in our family."

Nineteen months after Josh Engbregtsen's death, the boy who brought the methadone to the fair was sent to jail for supplying it to him, Sue Engbregtsen said.

The boy's mother is dead; she overdosed on methadone on what would have been Josh Engbregtsen's 18th birthday.

To contact staff writers Scott Finn or Tara Tuckwiller, use e-mail or call 357-4323 or 348-5189.

a security guard ..."

Since he took office last year, the 78-year-old Ore has repeatedly locked horns with Clendenin's town council. In April, the council laid off four town employees — including chief of police Dan Gillespie — to help curtail spending for the financially strapped town. Ore told the chief to ignore the council's actions.

Ore sued the council members in Kanawha Circuit Court over his right to hire and fire police leaders. Residents of the 1,000-person town have also sued members of the town council and the town recorder, alleging that

Clendenin's finances have been mismanaged. These cases are still pending.

Ore and council members have also disagreed on what to do with the town's roughly 80-year-old water plant. Ore favors selling the aging facility to West Virginia-American Water, but some town officials fear that would increase residents' water bills.

If convicted of obstructing a police officer, Ore could face a fine of up to \$500 and up to one year in jail.

Staff writer Jennifer Ginsberg contributed to this report. To contact staff writer Andrew Clevenger, use e-mail or call 348-

il liberties to a diverse class. "Having these people in the class with diverse backgrounds and outlooks on the issues that we were discussing made an enormous contribution to the class," he said.

The court's announcement followed six weeks of internal deliberations over whether to hear the appeals, an unusually long time.

"This is a very dramatic move. I expect it will create a big national discussion," said Gary Orfield, who heads the Harvard University Civil Rights Project

would not take this issue away from the states, as some have argued," Bush said. "It would take the issue away from the courts and put it directly before the American people."

First lady Laura Bush said recently that while Americans want to debate the issue, "I don't think it should be used as a campaign tool."

Vice President Dick Cheney, whose daughter, Mary, is a lesbian, splits with Bush on the issue. Cheney said he thinks Amer-

icans should do everything they can to accommodate any type of relationship, and that there should not necessarily be a federal policy in this area.

Human Rights Campaign President Joe Solmonese said Bush was favoring an amendment that would give Americans license to discriminate against homosexuals.

"The fact that he's out of step with the first lady and the powerful vice president tells me who he's answering to today," Solmonese said.



Partly sunny High 68, low 39 Details, 9A

The Killer Cure

New warning issued on methadone

Agency spurred to act by record number of overdose deaths

This is part of an ongoing Gazette investigation of methadone, a drug that has the unique ability to kill if you don't take it exactly as directed, and sometimes even if you do.

By Scott Finn and Tara Tuckwiler sfinn@wvgazette.com tara@wvgazette.com

Methadone "can cause death" if not taken exactly as prescribed, the federal Food and Drug Administration is now warning doctors and patients who take the popular painkiller. On Monday, the FDA issued a public health advisory for methadone, titled "Methadone Use for Pain Control May Result in Death."

The agency also revised the drug's package insert saying how much methadone is safe for pain patients to take. The old language about the "usual adult dose" was potentially deadly, according to pain specialists.

The FDA's action comes after a six-month Sunday Gazette-Mail investigation revealed that methadone helps to kill more people nationwide than any other prescription narcotic. Some

Please see WARNING, 9A

Games would aid seniors

Manchin says part of new gambling would boost home care

By Scott Finn sfinn@wvgazette.com

If the Legislature legalizes table gambling at the state's four racetracks next year, some of the proceeds should go to help senior citizens stay in their homes, Gov. Joe Manchin said Monday.

"If it is the will of the Legislature to allow local option elections for table games, part of that revenue should be devoted to in-home care," Manchin said.

The governor also defended his decision to allow the state's gasoline tax to increase next year.

The state's gambling industry has promised to try to get table games legalized during the Legislature's regular session, which begins in January. Their proposal would allow voters in the four counties that have racetracks — Kanawha,

Ohio, Hancock and Jefferson — to decide whether to allow table games. The "local option" bill passed the state Senate last year but died in the House of Delegates when Democratic leaders decided their members did not want to vote on the bill, especially in an election year.

Gambling lobbyists are touring a survey that shows a majority of state voters are in favor of local option elections. Opponents of table games say

that all state voters should be allowed to decide, not just those in racetrack counties.

On Monday, Manchin said he probably would sign a table games bill that includes a local option election — a position he has held consistently.

He added the idea that some of the racetrack money should go to help keep senior citizens out of nursing homes and in their own homes.

The Manchin administration

faced widespread criticism earlier this year for changing the eligibility rules for who qualifies for in-home care. Hundreds of seniors were kicked off the program.

In October, Manchin reinstated all the seniors who had lost their services and announced that the state would return to the less stringent eligibility standards. On Monday,

Please see MANCHIN, 9A

Turn on the lights



Gazette photo by LAWRENCE PIERCE

Workers at Coonskin Park ready Christmas lights Monday for the opening of the annual light display, scheduled for Friday.

Man thanks group for changing his life

By Jim Balow balow@wvgazette.com

Darrell Darby rents an apartment in the East End, works in the kitchen of an area hospital and pays his bills on time.

For most people, these are minor accomplishments, nothing to brag about.

Good Samaritans, 9A

But Darby, 61, says he wasted all but the last three years of his adult life in an alcoholic and drug-induced haze. He marks that lost part of his life in decades — 10 years here, 10 years there, working just hard enough to buy his next bottle or fix.

Those days are behind him now, he says. He thanks a certain 12-step program he can't name. He also thanks the Religious Coalition for Community Renewal and its Samaritan Inn, the shelter he called



Donor form, 8A

home for 20 months, and the Gazette Charities Christmas Fund, which paid for his dental work. Here is his story:

"I like to call my personality an addictive personality. I have to abuse everything — coffee, cigarettes, sex — the same way. Some of the things I've abused are not as bad as others."

He says his early years in Dunbar were fairly uneventful, raised essentially as an only child (his sister is 11 years older).

"Then I discovered alcohol in high school. Everything

Please see THANKS, 9A



AP photo

A zoo official holds a 7-day-old stump-tailed macaque at the state zoological park in Gauhati, India, in this July 9, 2005, file photo. Some macaques imported for research are now sold on the open market.

Millions of exotic pets are entering the U.S. with little or no screening

By Margaret Ebrahim and John Solomon The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Exotic animals captured in the wild are streaming into the U.S. by the millions with little or no screening for disease, leaving Americans vulnerable to a virulent outbreak that could rival a terrorist act.

Demand for such wildlife is booming as parents try to get their kids the latest pets fancied by Hollywood stars and zoos and research scientists seek to fill their cages.

More than 650 million critters — from kangaroos and kinkajous to iguanas and trop-

ical fish — were imported legally into the United States in the past three years, according to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service documents obtained by The Associated Press under the Freedom of Information Act.

That's more than two for every American.

Countless more pets — along with animal parts and meats — are smuggled across the borders as part of a \$10 billion-a-year international black market, second only to illegal drugs.

Most wildlife arrive in the United States with no quarantine and minimal screening for disease. The government

employs just 120 full-time inspectors to record and inspect arriving wildlife. There is no requirement they be trained to detect diseases.

"A wild animal will be in the bush, and in less than a week it's in a little girl's bedroom," said Darin Carroll, a disease hunter with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

While exotic pets from Africa, Asia and South America can be cute and fashionable, scientists fear that bacteria and viruses they carry can jump to humans and native animals. Recent statistics

Please see ANIMALS, 8A

High court hears pay bias case

By Mark Sherman The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Employees must complain about pay discrimination within six months or forfeit their claim, the Supreme Court was told Monday in a case closely watched by companies and civil rights groups.

Justices engaged in a lively, but inconclusive debate over how to apply a 180-day deadline for complaining about discriminatory pay decisions under Title VII of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Lilly Ledbetter sued Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co., claiming that after 19 years at the company's Gadsden, Ala., plant, she was making \$6,000 a year less than the lowest-paid man in the same job.

Ledbetter claimed the disparity existed for years and was primarily a result of her gender. A jury agreed, but an appeals court overturned the verdict.

Lawyers for Goodyear and the Bush administration argued against her claim.

Glen Nager, Goodyear's attorney, said the appeals court was correct. "Bring that claim or lose it," he said.

Justice Department lawyer Irving Gorenstein said that if the court were to side with Ledbetter, "it would undo the statute of limitations in pay cases."

Ledbetter's lawyer, Kevin Russell, told the justices that each smaller paycheck should be treated as a new act of discrimination.

Eight justices joined in the questioning. Justice Clarence Thomas was, customary for him, silent, but he could play a pivotal

Please see COURT, 9A

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wvgazette.com

U.S. war dead

Iraq 2,880 Elsewhere 346

Sources: AP/Department of Defense

Story, 7D



# WEATHER

**Today**  
PARTLY SUNNY  
HIGH 68° LOW 39°

**Wednesday**  
PARTLY SUNNY  
HIGH 70° LOW 52°

**Thursday**  
MOSTLY CLOUDY  
HIGH 73° LOW 50°

**Friday**  
RAIN  
HIGH 54° LOW 30°

**Saturday**  
MOSTLY SUNNY  
HIGH 48° LOW 29°

■ Today's forecast and Monday's temperatures to 8 p.m.

City	Hi	Lo	Fcst	City	Hi	Lo	Fcst
Anchorage	22	13	PCldy	Miami Beach	81	72	PCldy
Atlanta	64	49	Rain	Nashville	69	45	Cldy
Boston	47	45	Cldy	New Orleans	78	60	Cldy
Charlotte, N.C.	67	42	PCldy	New York City	60	48	Cldy
Chicago	63	52	Rain	Orlando	78	62	PCldy
Cincinnati	65	43	Cldy	Phoenix	64	50	Cir
Cleveland	63	48	Cldy	Pittsburgh	65	40	PCldy
Dallas-Ft. Worth	80	64	Cldy	Raleigh-Durham	71	41	PCldy
Denver	44	26	Snow	Richmond	68	39	Cldy
Detroit	62	48	Rain	Roanoke	69	39	PCldy
Elkins	67	26	PCldy	Salt Lake City	32	28	Snow
Honolulu	82	70	PCldy	San Diego	63	54	Cir
Houston	78	64	Cldy	San Francisco	55	45	Cir
Jacksonville	76	56	PCldy	Seattle	34	25	Cir
Las Vegas	56	43	Cir	Tampa	82	63	PCldy
Lexington	65	45	Cldy	Washington, D.C.	66	44	PCldy
Los Angeles	62	50	Cir	Wilmington, Del.	63	39	PCldy

■ Monday's weather around the world:

City	Hi	Lo	Wea	City	Hi	Lo	Wea
Amsterdam	55	46	Cir	Mexico City	71	39	Cir
Athens	64	50	Rain	Montreal	46	26	PCldy
Baghdad	67	46	PCldy	Moscow	42	37	Snow
Beijing	49	33	Cir	Nassau	81	66	Rain
Berlin	55	46	PCldy	New Delhi	71	42	Cir
Bermuda	75	68	PCldy	Oslo	48	41	Rain
Cairo	75	54	Cir	Paris	59	48	Cldy
Calgary	-10	-20	Snow	Rio de Janeiro	89	77	PCldy
Dublin	52	37	Rain	Rome	64	46	Cir
Hong Kong	82	75	PCldy	San Juan	88	75	Cir
Jerusalem	75	49	Cir	Seoul	57	41	PCldy
London	55	46	Rain	Stockholm	51	44	PCldy
Madrid	54	42	PCldy	Tokyo	55	44	Rain
Manila	89	77	Cir	Toronto	53	36	Cir

**Today's weather**

**MONDAY'S WEATHER IN CHARLESTON:**

- Temperatures: High .....67, Low .....35, High.....84 (1990), Low.....9 (1930)
- Precipitation: Last 24 hours at 8 p.m. ....none, Month total ..2.03", 2006 total ..41.37"
- Highest wind: 9 mph W
- Today's sun: Rise.....7:22 a.m., Set .....5:07 p.m.



## Jim Barach's Outlook

Today will be partly cloudy with a mild afternoon high of 68 degrees. Wednesday will also be partly cloudy with an even milder 70 degree high temperature. Thursday will reach 73 degrees, but skies will be mostly cloudy with a chance of rain showers by the afternoon. Much cooler weather moves in for Friday.



**Watch WCHS-Fox 11 Storm Team Weather with chief meteorologist Jim Barach, Karen Wynne, Doug Harlow and Steve Borecky.**

## Column 1

Inside information

### LOTTERIES

Monday, Nov. 27, 2006

**West Virginia:**  
Daily 3 — 435  
Daily 4 — 5350  
Cash 25 — 8-9-11-14-19-21  
**Ohio:**  
Night Pick 3 — 506  
Night Pick 4 — 4653  
Day Pick 3 — 092  
Day Pick 4 — 3990  
Rolling Cash 5 — 2-16-20-22-39

## MANCHIN

Continued from 1A

the governor said he had always been in favor of in-home care for seniors.

Manchin also defended a decision to allow the state's gasoline tax to rise next year.

Last year, gasoline taxes were set to increase because the price of gasoline skyrocketed after Hurricane Katrina, and part of the state's gas tax is tied to the wholesale price of gas.

Manchin froze the gas tax with an emergency order. That saved consumers more than \$50 million, but cost the road fund an equal amount.

Now, the emergency is over and the state needs the money to maintain roads, he said.

Manchin also announced \$2 million in recycling grants through the Rehabilitation Environmental Action Plan program, or REAP. Manchin reconstituted the program last year that was started by his late uncle A. James Manchin to remove junked cars from the landscape.

Manchin said he has told local communities to clean up their act, literally, if they expect to receive state funding for economic development.

"It's the best investment the state of West Virginia makes," he said.

To contact staff writer Scott Finn, use e-mail or call 357-4323.

## COURT

Continued from 1A

role in deciding the case. Thomas once was chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which is responsible for investigating workplace discrimination claims.

Applying the 180-day deadline to decisions made years ago makes no sense in a situation in which the disparity grew over time, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said.

Early on, "there is no reason to think there is going to be this inequality," she argued.

But Chief Justice John Roberts was skeptical that employees could "challenge the discrimination 15 years later."

Ledbetter was initially awarded more than \$3.8 million. A judge reduced the award to \$360,000.

The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the verdict. The appeals court said Ledbetter mainly was complaining about decisions made by her supervisors long ago, well after the deadline for raising allegations of discrimination.

In Ledbetter's appeal to the Supreme Court, her lawyers said each paycheck represented a violation of civil rights law by Goodyear, even if the lower pay resulted from discriminatory decisions made years earlier.

Goodyear denied discriminating against Ledbetter. She received periodic raises despite being ranked near the bottom of her group of workers, the company said.

## THANKS

Continued from 1A

changed." He started with beer, then switched to hard liquor when he found it was easy to buy the stuff from state stores.

He remembers a trip with a buddy to the St. Albans city fair, when the two loaded up early. "It was my first experience with something called lemon-lime gin. I didn't make it into the fair. I wound up in the back seat of a police car and went to jail.

"I think that was the most humiliating experience — having to wake up and call my mother and dad." After the first time, it became easier, though.

Once out of high school, Darby joined the National Guard. "When I went away to basic training, my drinking escalated tremendously."

He returned to Dunbar, held several low-level jobs. "Cashier at a drug store — anything to get a few dollars to buy something to drink. Really, I had a problem from Day One.

"I started running from myself. I transferred to the regular Army." Uncle Sam sent him to Vietnam in 1967, where he was exposed to marijuana. "I picked that up pretty regularly. One enhanced the other."

Following his tour and a bout with hepatitis, he was shipped back to Fort Eustis, Va. "By that time my drinking had escalated to every night — drinking and drugging, getting high."

Darby decided he wanted something better. An Army recruiter convinced him if he took a discharge, then re-enlisted, he could pick his job. "I chose to go to Panama. That's where I got exposed to cocaine. I did that probably every day for 18 months — snorted coke, smoked pot and drank liquor."

Uncle Sam wasn't quite through with him, though. He sent him back to Vietnam in 1970. "I started doing heroin. I did that every day for nine or 10 months."

"I got back to the States, I dabbled with everything — acid, speed, barbiturates, uppers, downers. The stuff that came along later — crack cocaine, crank — I never was exposed to that.

"I was 29. I moved back to Dunbar, just hung around. I didn't do anything." With the help of a relative, he got a job as an ironworker.

## WARNING

Continued from 1A

victims took the medicine exactly as their doctors told them to, and they died anyway.

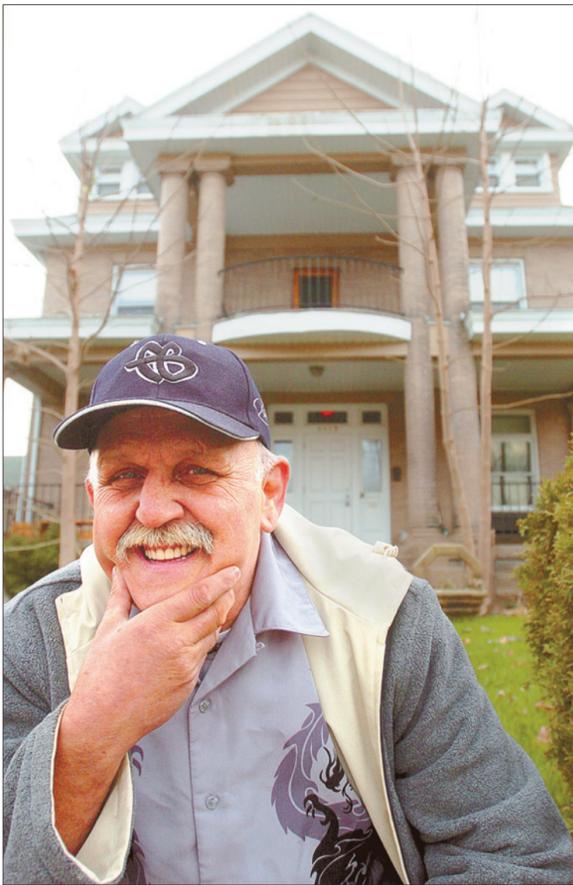
West Virginia led the nation in accidental overdose deaths blamed on methadone in 2003, with a death rate four times higher than the national average.

Federal officials knew about methadone's dangers for years, but failed to strengthen the warnings about the drug until Monday.

After the Gazette-Mail investigation was published in June, Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, and Sen. Jay Rockefeller, D-W.Va., called on the FDA to issue a stronger warning about methadone.

"This is a decision that should have been made many months ago," Rockefeller said Monday. "The FDA has a responsibility to American consumers to oversee the use of all prescription drugs, including methadone. Until now, their lax oversight of methadone has put the lives of thousands of patients in West Virginia and across the country in jeopardy.

"Today's decision means that doctors and patients will finally have a clear warning about the dangerous side effects of methadone. That knowledge will hopefully decrease the num-



Gazette photo by KENNY KEMP

## After decades of alcohol and drug abuse, Darrell Darby found his way after spending 20 months in the Samaritan Inn, a transitional home sponsored by the Religious Coalition for Community Renewal.

"By this stage of my life I was pretty miserable. There had to be something more." He spent 10 years in Houston. "At this time I was drinking and smoking pot every day. The only reason I worked was I needed the money to drink on.

"I come back here. My mother developed Alzheimer's. I used the excuse I was going to take care of her. We ended up having to put her in a nursing home. That left it wide open for me. I went crazy."

On one of his "escapades" in Ohio, he met a woman whom he later married. "This was the last 10 years of my drinking. She set out to try to change me. The more she tried, the stubbornner I got.

"She finally passed away in

2000. I didn't realize it, but that was the start of me realizing something had to change. I believed in my heart I was going to die with drinking and drugs.

"When you get to my stage, you give up. I would quit for periods but I had no program to reinforce it. I drank for another three years.

"May 5, 2003, was the first time I joined the 12-step program I'm in. It's the only thing I've found that gives me the ability to stay sober and clean.

"Going through that, I was exposed to a man who used to work here [at the Samaritan Inn], Eric J. I heard he could help me get involved in their program here."

Darby applied, passed the screening — including the

## Samaritan Inn wants to end vicious cycle

The Samaritan Inn was founded in 1989 by the Religious Coalition for Community Renewal, a group of clergy people from around Charleston, said Buz McCormick, social services director. "They were trying to end the cycle of people leaving the [homeless] shelter and coming back," he said.

"The goal is to help guys find permanent housing and gainful employment. By that I mean not McDonald's. The third goal, if it's an issue, is to graduate people to clean and sober. And people usually do. We rarely have people who don't have addiction issues."

Usually 10 or 11 men live at the Inn, for between six months to two years. "While we don't provide treatment, we do have a lot of programs," McCormick said. "A counselor from Sojourner's comes in one night a week."

The home gets some basic funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which has supported it since the start. Other money comes from local dona-

tions and fundraisers, like a recent bean dinner.

Last year, the Gazette Charities Christmas Fund gave \$2,000 to the Inn, which used the money to buy tools, dentures and counseling services for folks like Darby. This year the RCCR is asking for more donations for counseling, dentures and dental emergencies.

Many residents, especially those whose teeth have been damaged by meth, need dentures or other dental work, McCormick said. "It's a self-esteem and confidence booster, because they're going to a lot more meetings now, and are in close proximity with people."

Good teeth also help men get work, like jobs in an upscale retirement home, he said.

"Another thing we need help for is counseling," he said. "We've found it helpful to refer people to Kanawha Pastoral Counseling. They've been very helpful," he said. Residents must pay for counseling, but at a scaled price.

For information on the Samaritan Inn, call the RCCR at 346-6398.

Roundtable meeting with shelter residents — and moved in.

"I spent 20 months here. Without them, I would be dead. They helped me get teeth. Something was wrong with my eyes. They took me to the doctor's office.

"All this time, I was learning to stand on my own feet, and I didn't realize it. All my life, someone was taking care of me — the Army, my parents, my wife.

"Another thing they did, they made an appointment with a career counselor. She found I'd missed my true calling. I'd always done outside work. She said 'Darrell, how would you like to work in a hospital?'"

"I thought about, talked to Buz and my friends, decided I might like it." With the counselor's help, he applied to CAMC. They hired him to work at General Hospital.

"I work in the kitchen. I take trays to the patients, pick them up and clean them up. It has a bad side. You see a lot of sickness and death, but the good outweighs the bad.

"I started off at the bottom, part-time job. But I was clean and sober and gave eight hours of work and felt good about it. I was providing a service. You get a feeling of accomplishment."

Darby tries to give back to those who helped him find his way, by speaking to groups on behalf of the Samaritan Inn, or telling his story to a reporter.

"Life is good now. I owe everything to the RCCR. Your company didn't know me from nobody and got me back on my feet. It's indescribable.

"This place here, it gave me a safe place. It gave me a home. It also gave me friends. Although they were drunks and drug addicts like me, they were trying to do the same thing.

"I can't say enough about the people that sponsor this place. You hear about the horror stories that don't make it. I'm a miracle today. They pulled me up off the scrap heap of humanity."

To contact staff writer Jim Balow, use e-mail or call 348-5102.

## After the Gazette-Mail investigation was published in June, Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, and Sen. Jay Rockefeller, D-W.Va., called on the FDA to issue a stronger warning about methadone.

ber of needless deaths and overdoses."

Last year, the FDA issued a public health advisory for fentanyl, another narcotic painkiller, even though it causes fewer deaths than methadone. In fact, the word "fatal" appeared 28 times in the fentanyl package insert — but not once in the methadone (brand name Dolophine) insert.

Now, at the top of the new methadone patient information is a black-box warning: "Do not take a higher dose of DOLOPHINE or take it more often than prescribed," it warns in bold, underlined letters. "This can lead to an overdose and possible death."

Methadone was once given mostly to heroin addicts to ease their cravings. Recently, doctors have prescribed the drug to treat pain. Insurance companies favor it because it is cheap and effective.

But methadone helped to kill three times as many Americans in 2003 as it did in 1999, death certificates reveal, and medical examiners blame it for more overdose deaths than any other

narcotic except cocaine, according to the Gazette-Mail investigation. Medical examiners ruled 82 percent of those deaths accidental.

The FDA addressed several other findings of the Gazette-Mail investigation:

▲ The old package insert gave a "usual adult dose" of 2.5 to 10 milligrams "every three or four hours as necessary." That could lead a patient to think 80 milligrams a day is safe, even though studies have found that 50 milligrams or less can kill patients who aren't used to strong painkillers, the Gazette-Mail found. The FDA deleted that "usual adult dose" from the new patient information.

"This is great news," said Dr. Lynn Webster, founder of a non-profit foundation devoted to eliminating drug overdose deaths. Webster has traveled the country during the past year spreading the message about the potential dangers of methadone.

"It is absolutely critical that this information get out," he said. "Methadone is a powerful, effective, and lifesaving drug, but it is potentially deadly if it is mis-

used."

▲ The FDA issued 17 pages of new methadone-prescribing information for doctors, including information about how long methadone remains in the body — far longer than other painkillers, hanging around to cause overdoses long after it has stopped killing pain.

▲ Methadone has killed patients who were taking other medicines, including common anti-anxiety drugs such as Valium and Xanax. The new information tells doctors and patients about this.

▲ Methadone can kill if the starting dose is too high. The new information tells doctors to start patients on low doses of methadone and keep a close eye on them.

▲ Popular conversion tables, widely published as guides for doctors switching patients from various painkillers to methadone, are imprecise and often incorrect. The new information warns doctors and tells them to come up with a dosing schedule based on each individual's needs.

▲ Methadone can cause potentially fatal problems with heart rhythms. The doctor who published those findings in several medical journals told the Gazette-Mail that he was still trying to convince the FDA to strengthen methadone warnings. The new information warns patients and doctors about the potential for

life-threatening heartbeat problems.

"I know they were aware of it and wanted to do something more quickly," Dr. Raymond Woolsey said Monday. "They are grossly underfunded ... The FDA doesn't have the resources to do its work."

Dr. Bruce Goldberger, director of toxicology at the University of Florida Department of Medicine, was one of the first medical examiners to talk about the growing number of methadone overdose deaths, starting in 2002. In 2003, the FDA and other federal agencies participated in a national conference on methadone overdose deaths.

"It's about time that the FDA did something about this," Goldberger said.

He hopes the number of methadone overdose deaths will decline, or at least stabilize, as doctors and patients get the new information. When the FDA issued its similar health advisory about fentanyl, the number of deaths linked to that drug stabilized, he said.

"I'm pleased to see that the FDA has finally issued an advisory on the use of methadone for the pain management population. However, they knew about the problem in 2002, and here it's 2006. It's too late for many victims."

To contact staff writers Scott Finn or Tara Tuckwiller, use e-mail or call 357-4323 or 348-5189.

**WVU 41, Rutgers 39**  
Eers squeak by in triple overtime.  
SPORTS, 1C

**Champions**  
Parkersburg's Big Reds win the Class AAA football crown, beating Martinsburg 34 to 6.  
SPORTS, 1C

**Say cheese, Helvetia**  
Cheese is once again being made in this little Randolph County town founded by Swiss immigrants.  
VALLEY & STATE, 2B

**Deck your door**  
Decorate your entryway for the holidays with plants from your own back yard.  
LIFE & STYLE, 1F

# Sunday Gazette-Mail

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## Turning point for Iraq policy?

Panel likely to push for new war strategy

By Jennifer Loven  
The Associated Press

**Rumsfeld had called for major changes in Iraq. 7A**

WASHINGTON — President Bush has walked a fine line between embracing the mission of a bipartisan, high-profile advisory panel on Iraq and maintaining enough distance not to be bound by all — or even most — of its upcoming recommendations.

This week, the congressionally chartered Iraq Study Group presents Bush with its suggestions for a new way forward in the increasingly messy and unpopular war. Hopes went sky-

high that the commission has devised a winning prescription for the beleaguered U.S. effort, now well into its fourth year with violence not abating.

Expectations rose in part because two of Washington's most respected graybeards lead the group: Bush family loyalist James A. Baker III, a former secretary of state, and former Democratic Rep. Lee Hamilton, co-chairman of the Sept. 11 commission that

produced a gold-standard report on fighting terrorism.

Aware the study group could recommend some bitter prescriptions, the White House has indicated it will take the advice seriously but not accept it automatically. The president says the report will be only one of many he will consider and still insists that American troops should stay in Iraq until the country can take care of itself.

"We are not going to outsource the business of handling



AP photo

Lt. Richard Jahelka, of the 2nd Battalion, 4th Marines, aims at possible insurgents from the roof of a U.S. outpost in central Ramadi, Iraq.

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AFTER five of his co-workers died in the Ferrell Mine explosion in 1980, Rodney Sheets got out from underground. He took what he thought would be a safer job, as a drill operator at a Massey Energy mountaintop removal mine.

On Sept. 17, 2003, Sheets and another worker, William Birchfield, were crushed to

death by a huge rock truck.

Appalachian strip mines account for one-fifth of the nation's surface-mined coal. In the last decade, they accounted for 75 percent of the country's surface mine deaths.

Is enough being done to protect the coal miners who work at strip mines?

**ON PAGE 1E:**

A Sunday Gazette-Mail series on coal mine safety in America continues.

## Time's running out for tax breaks

By Jim Abrams  
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Millions of entrepreneurs, teachers and parents with kids in college have a financial stake in whether Congress, in the dying hours of Republican rule, revives tax breaks that expired 11 months ago.

If Congress fails to act, teachers no longer will be able to deduct up to \$250 for the books and supplies they pay for out of their own pocket.

Residents of Alaska, Florida, Nevada, South Dakota, Texas, Washington and Wyoming — each without an income tax — will miss out on an average \$1,500 deduction for state and local sales taxes.

Lawmakers have tried all year to renew the diverse mix of targeted tax breaks. Ironically, it is their popularity that has stalled passage.

The breaks, which expired last Jan. 1, enjoy wide support in both parties. Precisely because of this, lawmakers have sought to add them as a "sweetener" to contentious legislation in hopes of getting that legislation through.

Before the election, Republicans tried unsuccessfully to link the tax cuts to a bill that would reduce the estate tax, which most Democrats find unacceptable, and raise the federal minimum wage, which many Republicans dislike.

Lawmakers will take one more shot when they return this week to wrap up their work for the year. Yet they may not have the time or will to agree on a compromise.

Aides in both the House and the Senate said it was possible, with prospects best if the tax bill is not combined with other measures as Congress rushes to get

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## SANTA MAKES THE SCENE



M.K. McFARLAND/Sunday Gazette-Mail

Five-year-old Phillip Englund of Charleston, with dad Michael, waits for a glimpse of Santa as the tail end of the Christmas parade passes the glass-walled United Center.

## They love a parade Christmas caravan has a loyal following

By Sarah K. Winn  
sarahkwinn@wvgazette.com

For 36 years, Bob and Shirley Hinamon have been as reliable as Santa.

The couple has attended Charleston's Christmas parade every year since getting married in 1970, standing in the same

spot — by the old Woodrums' building on Virginia Street — for the past 25 years.

"There are probably some men that wouldn't set foot at the parade," Bob Hinamon said. "I just really like going."

In fact, it's Bob Hinamon, and not his wife, who has kept the tradition alive.

"I've always gone with him," Shirley Hinamon said. "Nobody else is that weird."

On Saturday, they arrived downtown about 9:30 a.m. for this year's parade to make sure they secured their spot.

The weather has never been

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## A deadly double standard

Big disparity in FDA's methadone dose for addicts, pain patients

By Scott Finn and Tara Tuckwiler  
sfinn@wvgazette.com  
tara@wvgazette.com

For two decades, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved dangerous dosing information about methadone for pain patients, but ordered safe doses for addiction patients.

People take the prescription drug methadone for two purposes: to relieve pain or to stop cravings for heroin, OxyContin and other narcotics.

Starting in the 1980s, the FDA ordered a much lower starting dose of methadone for addiction patients than for pain patients, even though pain patients could be at greater risk of an accidental overdose.

The FDA said a methadone clinic could give no more than 40 milligrams of methadone a day to a new addiction patient. The patient could be given more only if a doctor gave special permission.

But for pain patients, until last month, the FDA approved a "usual adult dose" up to twice that amount, 80 milligrams a day.

Patients could die if they took that much. Studies have found that doses of 50 milligrams or less of methadone have killed people who are "opioid naive" — not used to narcotics.

People addicted to heroin and OxyContin are not opioid-naive. Just the opposite — their bodies often have built up a tremendous tolerance to drugs.

So, why the difference?

"That's a very good question," said Mark Parrino, president of the American Association for the Treatment of Opioid Dependence, a New York-based nonprofit that supports methadone for addiction treatment.

"If methadone is being so carefully prescribed in the methadone maintenance programs, why weren't the labeling guide-



Parrino

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# PARADE

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a deterrent to the Hinamons, even though in some years snow and cold have caused the parade to be cut short, down to as little as 20 minutes, Shirley Hinamon said.

They've learned to dress warmly, she said. "I wear gloves and two pairs of socks."

"When it's snowing, just a few flakes, that's when you really get in the mood for Christmas," Bob Hinamon said.

Over the years, the Hinamons' kids have marched — their daughter with the Girl Scouts and as a baton twirler, and their son as a drummer.

Now, they're taking their grandchildren.

"I want to see the ponies," said 4-year-old Kamme Hinamon before Saturday's parade. "I think I'm going to ride them."

Sister Kalli, 2, was more anxious to see the man with the bag.

Shirley Hinamon said her favorite performers are the majorettes. Bob Hinamon said he most enjoys the bands and old cars. But he'd miss Santa as much as his grandkids, she said.

"It wouldn't be a Christmas parade without him, that's what it is all about," he said.

Afterward, the Hinamons had lunch and then launched into Christmas shopping, another parade-day ritual.

"That's when you really feel like it is Christmas," Shirley Hinamon said.

She said she doesn't think they'll ever get tired of the parade.

"I hope that we'll be around to go for 10 to 20 more years." To contact staff writer Sarah K. Winn, use e-mail or call 348-5156.



M.K. McFARLAND photos/Sunday Gazette-Mail

**ABOVE:** Bob and Shirley Hinamon have attended the parade since 1970. They've made granddaughters Kalli (left) and Kamme Hinamon regulars too.



**LEFT:** Charleston Newspapers' Toy Truck promotes the Toys for Tots donation effort.

**BELOW:** Five-year-old Tayon and 8-year-old Tjaysia English scramble for candy tossed along the Virginia Street parade route. Grandmother Tanita Taylor and sister Talayah Boxley, 2, are more interested in the marching bands.



# FDA

Continued From Page 1A

lines made equally clear and conservative for pain physicians?"

On Monday, six months after a Sunday Gazette-Mail series revealed the potentially deadly dosing information for pain patients, the FDA announced it is changing that information. The new prescribing information for doctors says they should give no more than 30 milligrams a day to new pain patients.

The FDA also released a public health advisory titled "Methadone Use for Pain Control May Result in Death." It warned of methadone's unique properties — how it slows breathing, how it can stay in the body for days, how taking an extra pill can kill a patient.

It was "about six months ago" that the FDA became aware that many people dying from methadone overdoses were legitimate patients with a prescription, said Dr. Bob Rappaport, director of the FDA's Division of Analgesics, Anesthetics and Rheumatology Products.

Rappaport requested that the FDA's Office of Surveillance and Epidemiology do its own study. Two months ago, he received that report.

"It became apparent that the problem was at least partially, if not significantly related to improper prescribing practices," Rappaport said. "Once this became clear where the problem was headed, we took some rapid action."

The makers of methadone also bear responsibility for the information on the package insert, since the FDA is required to collaborate with the drug companies on any label changes.

Neither of the two methadone manufacturers, Tyco/Mallinckrodt and Roxane Laboratories, responded to requests for comment for this article.

## The FDA knew by 2004

The FDA became aware of the potentially deadly dosing information patients were getting with their methadone pain pills "about two or three years ago," Rappaport said.

The FDA definitely knew by 2004, when it increased the warnings on one type of methadone — the type given intravenously to hospital patients, said Dr. Celia Winchell, medical team leader for addiction drug products at the FDA.

And in 2003, Rappaport, Winchell and other FDA officials participated in a conference devoted to the rise in methadone overdose deaths. News reports were blaming the deaths on methadone being abused or illegally sold by drug treatment patients.

When Rappaport and Winchell walked out of the conference, they believed that most of the people overdosing on methadone were taking it illegally, they said.

But conference participants concluded that liquid methadone from drug-treatment clinics was not the culprit — pain pills were.

Therefore, changing the label or sending out a warning to the public would do little good, they said.

"At the time, it didn't seem like physicians and patients were the problem," Winchell said. "It seemed like it was people who got ahold of the drug who weren't patients."

The conference report did say that doctors and legitimate patients were part of the problem. One of three likely scenarios for a methadone overdose death was "in the context of legitimate patient care, methadone accumulates to harmful serum levels during the first few days of treatment for addiction or pain."

## 'Radical' dose change

In June, the Sunday Gazette-

Mail investigation revealed for the first time that the increasingly popular painkiller methadone is a factor in the deaths of more people nationwide than any other prescription narcotic — 2,992 people in 2003.

The investigation also found that some people took their methadone exactly as prescribed and died anyway. It found that the "usual adult dosage" on the package insert patients got with their bottles of methadone pills could kill. It found that despite knowing about methadone's dangers, federal officials had not strengthened warnings on the pain pills.

The findings alarmed Dr. Robert Newman, director of the International Center for Advancement of Addiction Treatment,

Baron Edmond de Rothschild Chemical Dependency Institute of Beth Israel Medical Center in New York.

He had assumed pain patients got the same low, safer starting methadone doses that addiction patients get.

"The first public reference [to the dosing discrepancy] I have seen came from your article in the Gazette," said Newman, who has spent his career advocating access to methadone treatment for addiction. "If I had known, I would have been on the warpath ..."

"There is nobody in this field, going back 25 years, that would say there was any question: If you exceed 30 to 40 milligrams on day one for a methadone maintenance patient, you are risking an overdose situation."

The Compliance Office, the branch of the FDA that knew about the difference, dealt with methadone clinics in the 1980s. It is not the same branch that deals with painkiller safety, said Winchell of the FDA.

Newman worries doctors and pharmacists won't notice that the FDA has cut its maximum dosing recommendation for pain methadone in half.

The new "usual dose" is mentioned once, on page 15 of a 17-page "prescribing information" document.

"I think the real story is the usual dosage has changed radically," Newman said. "It's not even mentioned in the [public health] advisory. It's not even mentioned in the patient information sheet."

"How is a physician, reading the press or reading the advisory, going to be tipped off that there has been a radical change? How is the pharmacist going to know?"

The FDA believes any doctor who reads the public health advisory will check the dosing recommendations, Rappaport said.

Newman said he would like to see the FDA send every Drug Enforcement Agency-registered physician — all of them can prescribe methadone — "a separate, strongly worded advisory saying, 'This is the change in dosage.'"

Otherwise, he said, doctors might not realize they could be part of the overdose problem.

"Reading the advisory, the only conclusion a reasonable person can make is, 'Gee, I guess patients have just been taking this stuff the wrong way.'"

To contact staff writers Scott Finn or Tara Tuckwiller, use e-mail or call 357-4323 or 348-5189.

## On the Web

To read other stories in this series, go to: [www.wvgazette.com/section/Series/The+Killer+Cure](http://www.wvgazette.com/section/Series/The+Killer+Cure)

# Cat who became mascot of Iowa library dies in librarian's arms

The Associated Press

SPENCER, Iowa — The final chapter is closed on Dewey Readmore Books.

The 19-year-old cat, who became a mascot for the city's library after being found in a book drop, died Wednesday in the arms of librarian Vicki Myron.

The temperature was minus 10 when Myron and another librarian found Dewey under a pile of books in the library's book drop when they came to work one morning in January 1988.

"We didn't know if someone abandoned him or if a Good Samaritan found him on the street and shoved him in the book drop to get him out of the cold," she said. "His paws were frozen. We warmed him up and fed him and he just purred and cuddled. From day one, we felt he'd be the right personality for the public."

Since then, Dewey became famous, with television crews coming from as far away as Japan to do stories about him, Myron said.

The cat's name was chosen in a contest shortly after he was found. He was named after the Dewey Decimal System, which is used in most libraries to catalog books.

Dewey, who Myron said came running for cheeseburgers, boiled ham and chicken garlic TV dinners, had been experiencing health problems recently and was diagnosed with a stomach tumor shortly before Nov. 18, which was officially marked as his 19th birthday.

After his health rallied, he started "acting funny trying to hide" and Myron decided to take him to the vet and have him euthanized.

Library employee Kim Peterson said the staff is talking about having Dewey cremated and burying his ashes at the library.



AP photo

Spencer, Iowa, public librarian Vicki Myron is seen with Dewey Readmore Books before his death, in this Nov. 23, 2002, photo taken at the public library where Dewey lived.

# TAX BREAKS

Continued From Page 1A

out of town.

Negotiators say they have agreed that the proposal will cover two years, retroactive to 2006 and through 2007.

Businesses could be big losers if Congress fails to renew the research and development tax credit, which offers a 20 percent credit for new activities. One estimate puts the value of the credit to businesses at \$16.5 billion.

"There are some expenditures by the U.S. government that should really be called investments," William Archey, head of the American Electronics Association, said recently. "The R&D tax credit is unequivocally an investment."

Also important, said Philip Beram, chief tax counsel with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, are provisions that allow employers to claim a tax credit of up to \$3,500 for the first year of a worker who received public welfare for an extended time. Businesses also benefit from the provision allowing people from the seven states without income taxes to deduct state and local sales taxes.

The Internal Revenue Service said that on 2004 returns, 11.1 million taxpayers in those states claimed \$17.3 billion in deductions from state and local sales taxes.

Also in 2004, an estimated 4.7 million families claimed \$10.7 billion in deductions for college tuition and fees. In the legislation that Congress failed to pass before the

November election, taxpayers could claim above-the-line deductions of up to \$4,000, depending on their income, for higher education expenses.

In 2004, the full deduction was available to a taxpayer earning up to \$65,000, or \$130,000 for a couple filing jointly. A person earning up to \$80,000, or \$160,000 for a couple, could claim up to \$2,000.

In the meantime, 3.4 million teachers took advantage of the \$250 deduction for personal costs incurred to purchase supplies for their classrooms.

Congressional dalliance has assured that, even if the tax bill advances this year, there will be inconveniences for taxpayers.

The IRS, when it sent its basic forms and instructions for the 2006 filing season to the print vendor in early November, was unable to include lines, such as tuition and fees deduction, for items that as of now are no longer in tax law.

The tax agency included a cautionary note to taxpayers in its forms that the legislation was pending at the time of printing, and would have to provide special instructions later if the legislation becomes law.

Waiting for the new Congress to act next year could cause further complications. Many taxpayers, anticipating refunds, file their returns in February, and this group would have to file amended returns if the tax breaks are not on the books by then.

Delay, said Senate Finance Committee Chairman Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, "will cause hardship, tax compliance problems and confusion for the millions of taxpayers who claim these widely applicable tax benefits."