

Tanning Salons Should 'Feel the Burn'

By KATIE ROGERS

Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

I have never quite grasped the concept of serious self-endangerment. If you know something can put your life at risk, then why do it? Why do it every day of your life, a few times a week or more? No, I'm not referring to skydiving, rock climbing, or high-speed car chases — I'm talking about tanning.

I have been pale-skinned my entire life, explaining somewhat why I have never quite bought into or fed this cultural monster that seems to have sparked an interest in everyone from teenaged girls to thirtysomething men. I attribute this trend to our society's idolization of "bronzed" celebrities and the desire seen in young girls to model after them at any expense. This phenomenon began in the 1920s when Coco Chanel became the first celebrity to declare tanning to be a fashion statement.

As a young woman, I can say nearly every one of my close friends have gone tanning several times this year, and what's scarier is that I don't think any one of them is acting out of the norm for our age group. Most can't believe I have never stepped foot in a tanning booth, nor do I plan to. Don't get me wrong, a nice tan looks great, but I'd rather keep my skin healthy.

Americans and, more commonly, Caucasian women, have tapped into what seems to have become America's new addiction — sun beds. If you can believe it, there was a time in our past when pale was "in," viewed as the mark of an upper-class woman who was not subject to outdoor labor. Ancient Romans and Greeks would use lead chalk on their skin to achieve a lighter skin tone, and in Elizabethan England, women carried umbrellas for protection, and even tried arsenic to appear paler.

However, today is a different story, with just about everyone buying into the indoor tanning craze. Some come out red, others orange, others look the same as they did when they walked in, leathery and worn; however, they all are accumulating one common factor

Mixed Report on Pedestrian Fatalities

NEW YORK — "Skipping on Sidewalks 2008," a new report released on July 29 by the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, documents a slight decline in pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities from 2006 to 2007 but warns that sustained progress has yet to be made.

In 2007, 162 pedestrians and cyclists were killed in New Jersey, a 9 percent decline from the previous year. But the state is far from achieving a 1998 goal set by Governor Christie Whitman to halve the number of pedestrian fatalities from the 145 killed in 1997 by 2010.

Within the state, Middlesex, Essex and Bergen counties were the most dangerous places to walk or bicycle, with 19, 18 and 15 fatalities respectively in 2007. Hudson, Bergen, Essex and Passaic counties had the highest share of total traffic fatalities that were pedestrians or cyclists.

The report also finds that interest in walking has increased since 2000.

The campaign's analysis finds that New Jersey seniors are especially at risk of being killed as a pedestrian and are killed at rates that exceed the rest of the country.

Older New Jersey residents are more than twice as likely to be killed as a pedestrian than members of the population as a whole. The statewide pedestrian fatality rate is 1.79 per 100,000 persons. But for New Jersey residents aged 65 and older, the fatality rate is 3.72 — and the rate is 4.62 for those aged 75 and older.

The report applauds previous leadership from state officials and says the state should implement more policies like the five-year, \$74 million initiative Governor Jon Corzine began in 2006 that targets funding to bicycle and pedestrian projects. A recent campaign analysis found that funding for bike and pedestrian projects is up from 2005 but declined slightly this year.

The campaign recommends three strategies to reduce pedestrian and cyclist deaths and better target funding, including using the next reauthorization of the Transportation Trust Fund as an opportunity to increase funding for New Jersey Department of Transportation pedestrian and bicycle programs.

The full report, as well as county fact sheets, can be found at tstc.org/reports.html.

— they're upping their risk of melanoma development, the most deadly form of skin cancer.

Even at the peak of summer, the tanning business is still booming, generating some \$2 billion yearly, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation. Essentially, this business is thriving off of destruction and addiction and is left with little regulation. Doctors have claimed the only way to really bring an end to this damage is to close down the industry completely. If tanning is as dangerous as it is believed to be, why aren't taxes imposed on tanning salons, similarly to cigarette smoking and alcohol?

Although it is commonly believed indoor tanning helps to defend skin against the harmful damage of the sun's UVA and UVB rays, such is not the case. Only those with naturally darker skin have more protection than a fair-skinned, freckled sun addict, no matter how many times he or she goes tanning. Sunburns are more dangerous than deep tans; however, both have been linked to cancer in far too many cases. Just one blistering sunburn in a person's life will up their chances of developing this deadly disease.

While tanning salons do use more UVA rays and hide behind the mask of providing "controlled" sun exposure, the said foundation's studies have proven these salons often break limits of safe UV exposure during visits to their sun beds or booths.

So how serious is the risk? A study from Dartmouth Medical School showed those visiting tanning salons daily have more than doubled their melanoma risk, and, in another study, gave tanning addicts more than seven times the risk of developing this form of skin cancer, from simply tanning indoors 10 times per year. The National Cancer Institute cites approximately one million new cases of melanoma so far for 2008. So — this is not something to be taken lightly.

Go to the beach but protect yourself. Wear a hat, sunscreen or even buy an umbrella. I have had more fun in the shade than I have suffering under the merciless sun. Certain types of clothing and hats are now made with higher SPF protection as well.

I am also a fan of sunless tanning creams that, when applied properly, can give the illusion of the natural glow that has become so popular today without killing yourself, literally. Spas often offer spray-on tans and massages for less than a monthly tanning package would cost. Most importantly, visit a dermatologist yearly and get your skin checked. Everyone, despite age, race and gender, is subject to the development of melanoma.

It's the summer. Go out and enjoy the beautiful weather, but be smart. I'm not against a healthy glow, but I am proposing to keep it healthy.



Katie Rogers



HIS MUSIC'S SHORE TO PLEASE...Gail Smith of Westfield kisses folk-rock singer Steve Forbert before his concert on LBI on August 2. Gail and her husband Frank Smith have attended Forbert's concerts for years. Forbert, a native of Mississippi, honed his skills in Greenwich Village and is a veteran touring performer. He has performed in Westfield. His recent CD features "strange names" of towns in northern New Jersey, which he performed for the LBI crowd to wild applause. The lyrics are at steveforbert.com.

Letters to the Editor

Garwood Activist Discusses County's Fair Share for Borough

The council meeting of July 22 was the death knell for Garwood. The council could have shown leadership, stood up for the residents and told Union County, "no more stealing of our tax dollars, we deserve our fair share."

At that night's council meeting, the lone Republican (there are six Democrats) put forth a resolution noting the inequities of the county finances toward Garwood and that something needs to be done with county representation. The council Democrats dismissed this positive action by calling it politics! We should be livid that they would backstab the Garwood residents all over their defense of "politics". They could have made a great bi-partisan statement for the residents by voting yes.

We pay the county over \$2.2 million a year in taxes. Factor in what the county receives in state and county grants, and we should get another \$1.7 million per year. That equals nearly \$4 million per year. Bottom line, we don't even come close.

The odd thing about this is that Democrats control the county and Democrats control our town council, so we should be getting a lot of attention from the county. I am an advocate for Garwood at the county and I never see the mayor and council there pushing for Garwood.

Although, in June Garwood did get \$25,000 for brook work for which I thanked the mayor and freeholders. But where's the other \$3,875,000?

Recently, Cranford, Kenilworth and Summit have passed resolutions about getting their fair share from the county. Summit did a study of county services and Cranford is doing one.

We pushed for a "pay to play" ordinance to prohibit politically connected developers from receiving priority treatment in Garwood. Instead, we get projects

that have porches collapsing within one year and rental apartments that have low quality trusses. Go visit and see for yourself. Of the three major projects in Garwood, each was proposed by politically connected developers and the law firm of Senator Lesniak.

Lesniak is the self-proclaimed Democrat political boss and along with Charlotte DeFillippo, the county Democrat chair, controls the hiring, candidates and appointees in our local and county governments. Lesniak's law firm even received almost \$500,000 from our sewage authority — up from \$50,000 eight years ago.

We're now paying dearly with our tax dollars because the council Democrats allowed Lesniak into Garwood. All the borough appointees are now connected to the county and Lesniak; the judge, prosecutor, attorney, planning board engineer and the treasurer. Makes one wonder what the main criterion was for these appointments.

It is not the Democrats versus the Republicans as I am an Independent. It is the people versus the government. We are faced with spiraling property taxes, services being cut back and poorly built projects. Our budget is in shambles. Four years out of five, Garwood had to go to Trenton to be financially bailed out.

It is time to change. The good thing is that there are two political parties running council candidates in Garwood. We have a choice in November.

Bruce Paterson
Garwood

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Letters to the Editor

People Need to Stand Against Health Commissioner's Determination

As an activist to keep the Muhlenberg Regional Medical Center open, it is a heart-wrenching experience to observe the complete collapse of the federal, state and local governments that do not consider the health needs of the people of Plainfield, New Jersey and the surrounding cities and towns. The hospital is still open. The politicians have not completely closed the doors yet. However, Heather Howard, commissioner of the Department of Health and Senior Services, has made the final decision to close the Hospital by approving the Certificate of Need submitted by Solaris Health Systems.

I feel the number one principle of government is to provide for the needs of its people. Healthcare is a right of all citizens and not that of only the ruling class. Would the hospital be allowed to close if it was located in a more affluent community? The issue of closing the Muhlenberg Regional Medical Center (MRMC) is an issue of big corporate needs vs. the right of the people in the Plainfield area.

Gov. Jon Corzine, a darling of Wall Street, has shown very little public interest in the matter. Ms. Howard, appears to be following the governor's dictates and stated the hospital must be closed prior to the first of two Public Hearings, which drew in excess of 1,000 people each.

Mayor Robinson-Briggs of Plainfield keeps stating publicly that she is against the closing of the Hospital; however, she said that the City of Plainfield would not join in the legal appeal because it would undermine ongoing efforts to help the hospital and would expose the city to hefty attorney fees.

The "People" Organization for Progress is not asking for the City of Plainfield to solely finance the appeal of a negative decision by the Commissioner of Health. They want Plainfield to be the first city to execute a stay with the Court and to participate and lead in any appeal process.

The Plainfield City Council has passed a resolution opposing the closing of the hospital; however, its members have not addressed the issue of what action would be taken if an appeal were needed. The Plainfield City Council appears not to understand the pleas of a large number of speakers who appeared before the council on two Monday night City Hall sessions.

Assemblyman Jerry Green, who has stated he wants the hospital to remain open, has not shared with the public his new visions on keeping an acute care hospital open. He did create a Task Force that worked with other hospitals to accommodate patients from the Muhlenberg service area if the hospital were closed. He also sponsored a presentation by a developer named Drew Piscatelli. Unfortunately, Mr. Piscatelli's plans sounded more like the development on a Medical Mall than an acute care hospital.

Assemblywoman Linda Stender did

have the Mayor of Fanwood, New Jersey speak for her at the first public meeting opposing the closing of Muhlenberg, but has not publicly participated in the issue. It is my opinion that we should not be in this position now. Each voter of Plainfield should raise these questions before voting in the next election. What side of the Muhlenberg issue was the politician on? What was his or her vision? What has he or she done to prevent the Muhlenberg Hospital from closing?

The truth of the matter is that we need the political help now! The City of Plainfield must be a leader and file an appeal with the court in order to stay the executive order to close the hospital. The hospital must be kept open for the citizens of the Plainfield area.

Solaris used bankruptcy as a threat to force local and state politicians to approve the closing of Muhlenberg Hospital. Solaris will have difficulty meeting the definition of bankruptcy, since they have \$85 million dollars in net assets as of Dec. 31, 2007. Net assets can be defined as total assets minus liabilities. The 2007 MRMC Loss for 2007 is \$16.7 million. This compares with a \$2.9 million financial loss in 2006. As a retired accountant, I have called for an Independent Audit of the books and records of the MRMC and all related affiliated corporations, prior to the Ms. Howard acting on the request to close the Medical Center. The allocation of income and expenditures between related entities should have been audited, as well the nature and reasons for all capital expenditures. Did management plan the 2007 loss?

A contributing factor to any current loss on the books of Muhlenberg is the fact that since 2003 Solaris Health Systems has moved a number of very successful operations from Muhlenberg to its sister hospital — John F. Kennedy Hospital. Some of the functions transferred to JFK Hospital are as follows: Pediatrics, Outpatient Physical Therapy, Orthopedics and in-patient Oncology. The Solaris Management Team took the position that it is losing money and that it cannot afford to keep giving cash to the MRMC. This statement should have been examined!

In 2008, Solaris Health Systems moved two of MRMC's strongest operations — the Bariatric and Colon and Rectal Units — to JFK Hospital. Meanwhile, the Ob-Gyn pre-natal and post-natal services were transferred to the Trinitas Hospital in Elizabeth. Much to my surprise these 2008 transfers were made without any challenges from the local politicians. I find this frustrating at best.

It is time for all those people negatively affected by the actions of the Commissioner of Health and Solaris Health Systems to call, write and complain to their State and local representatives.

John Gestel
Plainfield

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