Psychedelic 'hug drug' taking students by storm

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Hayes State Writer

SARASOTA — They do it alone or in groups, during quiet nights at home or at rowdy parties. Some couples find it bonding, while other people appear normal but deliriously happy.

That's how one New College student describes the effects of the illegal drug "ecstasy," known more affectionately as "the hug drug.

Some New College students are following a path blazed by Rick Doblin, a 33-year-old former student who is now one of the nation's most outspoken advocates of ecstasy, known to scientists as MDMA.

The psychedelic drug, which many claim generates a feeling of euphoria for several hours, is making the social rounds on campuses all over the country, according to reports.

In a letter published in the New England Journal of Medicine, a Stanford University survey found that 39 percent of the school's students had tried the drug an average of four times.

Syd, who asked that he only be identified by his nickname, said he was not surprised by the Stanford figures and guessed that rate probably would hold true for New College as well.

Syd said he has never tried the drug but has spent time with people on it, finding most ecstasy users warm and optimistic company.

"It's unique. It's very much a tripping kind of drug but it's not like acid. It's not like marijuana, that makes you stupid and not like speed that makes you hyper," Syd said. "It opens you up deeply and intimately."

Two friends of ecstasy guru Doblin believe the government's decision in 1986 to classify MDMA in the same category as the banned heroin and LSD was premature andclouded by "Just Say No" hysteria.

The use of MDMA for psychotherapy was just getting underway when the drug was banned suddenly. Under its present classification, the drug cannot be tested on humans.

"Nobody says MDMA will cure mental illness but I think it is a tool people can use to cure themselves," said David Wilkens, 23, a 1986 New College graduate.

Wilkens believes the federal government is afraid of ecstasy because of its resemblance to the psychedelic drugs of the late 1960s.

"They are afraid they could lose control of society the way they did back in 60s," he said.

Ironically enough, the Food and Drug
Administration's research didn't even involve MDMA, but a chemical relative known as MDA which caused brain damage in animals in large doses.

Allen Hopper, 25, a fourth-year New College student, said Doblin plans to redo the MDA animal research using ecstasy to see if the results are the same. He then will take his findings to the FDA.

Doblin's team also will be testing former users of the drug to see if it has had any long-term side effects, Hopper said.

Despite avid interest in the drug, Wilkens and Hopper would not say how widespread its use is on campus.

"Just from talking to people I would say its use (nationwide) is pretty high," Wilkens said.

Another student hasn't seen much of the drug at all. From first year student Mike Campbell's point of view, use of ecstasy is not prevalent at New College.

"I see just the average stuff, like marijuana," he said. "But some of the drugs that are on their way out at other colleges are getting popular here, like mushrooms and LSD."

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**THE GOOD GUYS AND THE BAD GUYS**

In the past half century, when I was a boy it was always the good guys against the bad guys and today it's no different. The good guys always win in the end but the difference is that fifty years ago they rode white stallions and shot Colt .45s and today the good guys drive Porsches and shoot Uzi machine guns! Sometimes, though, common sense and brainpower defeat the bad guys.

Near the end of World War II, Sergeant Matt Wiley stepped off the train in his hometown. He was beginning a well-earned thirty-day leave from his job as a tail gunner on a B-29 flying missions against the Japanese. When Sergeant Wiley stepped down from the worn and frayed railroad coach he expected to spend a relaxing month with his parents, who owned a small lumber business. Instead, he came home to illness, despair, and financial ruin.

Sergeant Wiley's mother explained the situation to him because his father was bedfast, not so much from physical illness but from worry. He faced losing everything he had worked so many years for. Mrs. Wiley told her son about a man named Pat Walls who had bought a woodworking mill nearby. Pat Walls was not his father. Through trick or trade he had a number of war contracts and he was using unfair tactics such as equipment sabotage, unexpected fires, and labor strife at the Wiley plant. She went on to explain that the local bank held a $12,000 note against them and if a contract for a large order of veneer, which would pay off the note couldn't be delivered soon, all would be