

# MDMA advocate seeks legalization of the drug

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SARASOTA — Laid-back, psychedelic lobbyist Rick Doblin thinks an illegal drug made from the oil of nutmeg could help bring peace to the world.

To be sure, the Sarasota resident would add in his soft voice, that would be the ultimate goal of the altered spice — the drug that people alternately call Ecstasy, MDMA and Adam, and lovingly describe as peaceful, relaxing, soothing and unifying.

For starters, Doblin would like to use the drug for terminal cancer patients and for use in counseling to break down patients' emotional barriers.

In fact, he would like to start his own clinic in Sarasota, where the drug could be experienced.

The U.S. government, however, describes MDMA as dangerous and mysterious and has outlawed its use except in research as of July 1. For the first time since its origin in

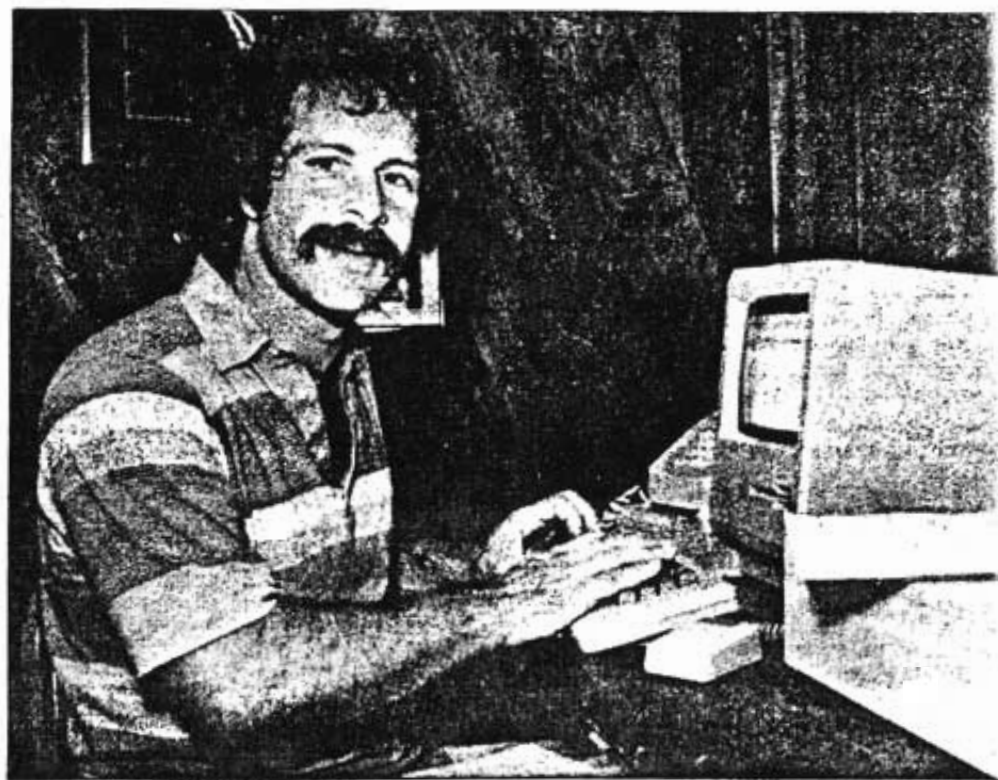
1914 as an appetite suppressant, MDMA, or — 3,4 methylenedioxymethamphetamine — is now a Schedule 1 drug. That puts it in the same class as heroin and LSD, and means the drug has no medical use.

Doblin is MDMA's leading lobbyist.

He has been campaigning all summer to put MDMA on the Schedule 3 rung, which would make it a prescription drug along the lines of Tylenol with codeine or diet pills.

His single-mindedness about MDMA has made him somewhat of a celebrity. He coordinated a Phil Donahue show on the subject. He has been talked about on all three networks. New York, Newsweek and Life magazines have quoted him. This month, he is scheduled to do a talk show in Philadelphia.

But Doblin is not the bureaucratic, lawyerly, lobbyist type, nor the flamboyant, robes-flowing Timothy Leary of the 1980s.



Bradenton Herald photo

MDMA

To B-3

Rick Doblin's crusade for MDMA has brought the student national attention

## MDMA

From B-1

What he is, to say the least, is unconventional.

He is a 31-year-old New College student, who after 14 years at the college, still doesn't know when he will graduate.

He has a sensory deprivation tank in the large, modern, wooden house of obtuse angles and stained-glass windows he built with his own hands. And yes, he does have a massage room in another wing.

He likes to meditate in his treehouse and talk to his dog Wolf, but he also has an extensive library of books on psychology; a computer to keep track of the finances of his MDMA foundation, Earth Metabolic Design; and a stack of research papers on MDMA with his name on them.

MDMA is a serious, scholarly pursuit for Doblin.

"For me it's an effective way of learning," he said, sitting in the womb-like atmosphere of his home in eastern Sarasota County. "The planet is in danger. We live ignoring the shadows. I'm after learning, growing, being more alive. I'm after a degree of health of balance, of contributing as much as I take out of this world."

Doblin believes MDMA moves people beyond their own isolated selves and connects them to all of humanity. It is an Eastern approach to spirituality that Doblin thinks can save this world from nuclear holocaust.

Doblin says he has traveled all over the world and worked with Buddhist and Christian monks, the Dalai Lama of Tibet, rabbis, psychologists and United Nations' leaders.

He can afford to do this, thanks

to his grandfather, a wealthy Chicago industrialist who left him enough money so that he doesn't have to worry about making a living.

"I knew I had enough to live on when I was in college," he said. "Career paths didn't matter. My survival needs were taken care of. Religion didn't provide, nor my country."

"So I thought psychedelics could open me up to the spiritual side of my self."

In contrast to his reputation, Doblin said he does not think psychedelics are for everyone and he does not advocate using them just to have a good time.

On the other hand, he says the drug, which costs about \$10 a "hit" or dose, should not be restricted, not even as a permissive Schedule 3 drug, which would limit its use to medicine only.

Doblin says the drug should be used by those who want to learn and experience.

Frank Sapienza, of the Drug Enforcement Administration in Washington D.C., thinks Doblin, and other advocates of the drug, are dreaming.

"They're well-meaning but naive," he said.

"When you listen to some of these people they'll admit people are taking MDMA for curiosity, a good time, creative writing. These aren't really good uses."

Sapienza and other DEA and Federal Drug Administration officials say that there may very well be a legitimate use of the drug. But because MDMA has not been clinically tested to FDA's approval, no one really knows its effects on the body.

The drug was being abused on the streets, they say.

"The more we look into this, the more and more people we find who have experienced problems," Sapienza said.

According to DEA statistics, two people have died from using the drug.

Even ignoring the street use, Sapienza said government officials do not think psychiatrists should be dispensing the drug, as some had been doing for the last decade, without knowing its dangers.

"It's irresponsible," he said. "They pass it out, but they're not willing to do the research."

Doblin said he cares about researching MDMA, and that he is trying to raise funds for testing on animals and, eventually, humans. According to Doblin, the worst effects are nausea and a tightening of the jaw.

Dr. Charles Frith, a researcher at Intox Labs and the University of Arkansas, said the animal study he finished two months ago on MDMA indicates no brain damage in rats.

According to the government and a University of Chicago study it used in its arguments to place MDMA on Schedule 1, MDMA causes damage to nerve terminals in the brain.

Despite the opposition, Doblin thinks he has a good chance of bringing MDMA down to the Schedule 3 class next year. Sapienza says that would be highly unlikely.

"The American public and the American government is not ready for this, despite the good intentions," he said.