

## New 'guru' pitches Ecstasy, the drug labeled both a killer and medical tool

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SARASOTA — What you need to know about Rick Doblin begins with the bumper sticker on the back of the Porsche parked next to his ultramodern house.

"Warning," the bumper sticker says, "I brake for hallucinations."

It is a slogan of another day that seems so long ago — the 1960s, the days of mind-bending drugs and the guru who promoted them, Timothy Leary.

The comparisons between Leary and Rick Doblin are inevitable, because Doblin may be on his way to becoming the guru of the drug that some people think will be to the '80s what LSD was to the '60s.

Technically, the drug is called MDMA, a synthetic compound with the nearly unpronounceable chemical name of 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine. Unpronounceable, but so popular that last July 1, federal authorities made the drug illegal — and cartoonist Garry Trudeau made it the current subject of his comic strip *Doonesbury*.

ON THE street, where MDMA is renowned for the easy

good feeling it provides, the drug is called Adam, XTC or Ecstasy. In *Doonesbury*, it's called "Intensity."

The trouble is, the debate over MDMA is no joke. Some experts believe the drug is addictive and causes brain damage. Two deaths have been attributed to it.

But other researchers think that MDMA could be useful in psychotherapy, because it appears, in limited doses, to provide the self confidence and heightened self awareness needed for breakthroughs in counseling. The doctors were lobbying for the right to test the drug with people when federal authorities made it illegal last month.

Doblin, who wants to be a "psychedelic psychotherapist," was lobbying with them. But to some scientists, he is an embarrassment, because Doblin believes in what is euphemistically called "recreational use" of the drug just as much as he believes in the need for research.

A Harvard psychiatrist with whom he says he is working, in the continuing drive for human testing of MDMA, nearly groaned when asked about Doblin. "I wish he'd leave my name out of these things," said Dr. Lester Grinspoon.

Please see ECSTASY, 10-B



Rick Doblin, left, and above in a photo he says shows him after taking his last dose of MDMA on June 30. It was made illegal in July.

## Ecstasy from 1-B

EVEN DOBLIN'S father, an Illinois doctor who heads a drug-abuse clinic, thinks his son is a little wrong-headed. "He's a big boy, and I can't control what he does," says Dr. Morton Doblin. "He knows how I feel."

The son knows his critics, knows his father sometimes wishes all the publicity his son is getting would go away. But Rick Doblin doesn't believe he's killing his cause by endorsing street use of MDMA.

"I don't believe any drug is good or bad," he says in a gentle voice. "It's how you use it."

He also needs to talk about MDMA, even if it infuriates people. "I'll always have an unsatisfied need to be accepted," he says. "Being able to talk about MDMA in the open is kind of like healing for me."

If talking is healing, Rick Doblin should be a cured soul. He's a celebrity talker these days, featured in national magazines and television shows. Even officials of Straight Inc., the nationally known drug treatment program based in Pinellas County, say they want to meet with Doblin.

Doblin keeps a letter from Straight, and volumes of other material on MDMA, at his Sarasota house, a remarkable place he built for himself. It is shaped like a triangle perched on one side, with one wall filled by a stained glass window.

AT ONE end of the house, he has a sensory deprivation tank, a black box full of warm salt water in which he sometimes floats and meditates. At the other end is a room where he gives massages. In between is his waterbed, a teddy bear, shelves and shelves of books on psychology, religion, drugs and mysticism, and a huge dog that he says once belonged to rock star Gregg Allman.

Scattered throughout Doblin's house are color photographs of several old girlfriends, done in the gauzy style of Bob Guccione. The women in the photos are lovely. They are also nearly naked.

Doblin is 31. He has never been married. You might say he hasn't yet entirely grown up. His family is sup-

porting him while Doblin finishes his degree at New College in Sarasota. He started school there when he was 17, but only lasted a few terms. "I wasn't mature enough to handle it," he says.

He tried LSD therapy and primal scream therapy. His father sent him to a psychiatrist, but after two visits, he rebelled at the doctor.

He built houses in Sarasota, dabbling in hallucinogens all the while, and sometimes dealing in drugs in what he says was a minor way.

A few years ago, Rick Doblin went back into therapy, back to New College to get a psychology degree. He soon found MDMA.

**"I don't believe any drug is good or bad. It's how you use it."**

— Rick Doblin, MDMA advocate

Taking MDMA is like inhaling "an enormous deep breath," he says. "There's a peacefulness that comes from being where you're at, and accepting the fullness of it."

But there is a business side to Rick's high. He is now looking for investors to back a pharmaceutical company he wants to launch, to conduct research on MDMA and to manufacture the drug.

And that's not all. He thinks there is a link between therapeutic use of the drug and what he calls "global spirituality" and "nuclear strategy" — that widespread use of the drug could teach nations the "oneness" of people and lead to the control of nuclear arms.

The pitch sounds remarkably like the flower power of 20 years ago. And so it is not surprising that Doblin has, in a frame, a supportive letter from Timothy Leary.

Leary's only other advice to him, Doblin says, was passed on through a friend. The advice was to get a haircut. The '80s, after all, are definitely not the '60s.