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Wii LOVE TO BOWL

Registered nurse **Patty O'Donnell**, right, watches as **82-year-old Yvonne Pepin** tries her hand at video bowling at the Franklin Senior Center. Below, **Margo Theodoss**, right, boxes against social services advocate **Renee Grenier** during a Wii class at the Hudson Senior Center.



DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY MIKE SPRINGER, ABOVE; DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY ALLAN JUNG, BELOW

Nintendo video game virtually thrills seniors

By Peter Reuell
DAILY NEWS STAFF

From the outside, they looked like any other assortment of little old ladies. Moments after I walked into the Sunshine Club at Franklin's Senior Center, Lena Vittti filled me in on the rules: "You have to smile to come in the door." Little did I know I was stepping into the lion's den. I'd gone to Franklin to take on Vittti and a handful of other seniors in a game of what's become the hottest must-have item at area senior centers - Wii bowling. Sure, I was a Wii newbie - the closest I'd come to using the video game system was a display at Best Buy, but being in my early 30s, and part of the generation that grew up with video games, I went in feeling pretty confident. Vittti and other members of the Sunshine Club, though, were ready for me, and they had their game BOWLING, Page A8



"It's on our short list of new fitness activities." Amy Loveless, executive director of the Marlborough Council on Aging

MENTAL DISORDERS

Battling the stigma along with illness

► For some, the shame complicates their struggles

This is the first in a weekly series on the stigma of mental illness.

By David Riley
DAILY NEWS STAFF

If Cindy had a heart ailment, a doctor might have sat her down and walked her through her options for treatment. Battling mental illness, she says she was locked in a state hospital and told by a staff member she would be lucky if she ever got out. If she broke a bone, Cindy

might have gotten a cast, crutches and a little patience at home. Grappling with bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress and substance abuse, her husband said she was lazy and her treatment was just "a vacation." For decades, most health professionals have accepted that mental illnesses are legitimate, serious medical problems. But for many who suffer from them, they often remain a source of shame and ridicule, and for the public, a cause for fear, suspicion or misunderstanding. "It's just slow for people to realize it's a real illness," said Iris Carroll, director of Programs for BARRIERS, Page A8

STATE HOUSE RACES

How can a political endorsement help?

► Candidates glad to have the backing, but it's votes that count

By Dan McDonald
DAILY NEWS STAFF

It's election season. Cue the endorsements. As the race for the 6th Middlesex District state representative seat among Democrats Dawn Harkness, Chris Walsh and incumbent state Rep. Pam Richardson, inches closer to the Sept. 16 primary, political al-

liances have emerged. But does a list of local luminaries and unions praising a pol add votes, or offer any meaningful nuance to such a race? Some voters suggest the endorsement is nothing more than acutely calculated networking, an old-fashioned political power play. Framingham Republican Town Committee Chairman Ed McGrath, for one, can not recall an instance when a single endorsement swayed his vote. ENDORSEMENTS, Page A7

Romney preps for 2nd run if McCain fails

AP NEWS ANALYSIS

By Glen Johnson
ASSOCIATED PRESS

ST. PAUL, Minn. - Like his father, Mitt Romney ran for governor and won. Like his father, Mitt Romney ran for president and lost. The question now is whether Mitt Romney once again follows in the footsteps of George Romney and serves the president in a Cabinet position. By all accounts, he hopes not. Since ending his own bid for the Republican presidential nomination in February, former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney has played the role of supplicant, doing everything asked of him to advance the candidacy of his former rival, the presumptive GOP nominee John McCain. He played attack dog in media interviews arranged by the McCain's staff, even enduring ROMNEY, Page A6

Strengthening storm takes aim at Gulf Coast



AP PHOTO BY ROB CARR

New Orleans residents evacuate from the approaching Hurricane Gustav at the Greyhound Bus and Amtrak station yesterday. A million people took to Gulf Coast highways as the season's most powerful Atlantic storm takes aim at Louisiana.

By Becky Bohrer
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW ORLEANS - Spooked by predictions that Hurricane Gustav could grow into a Category 5 monster, an estimated 1 million people fled the Gulf Coast yesterday - even before the official order came for New Orleans residents to get out of the way of a storm taking dead aim at Louisiana. Mayor Ray Nagin gave the mandatory order late yesterday, but all day residents took to buses, trains, planes and cars - clogging roadways leading away from New Orleans, still reeling three years after Hurricane Katrina flooded 80 percent of the city and killed about 1,600 across the region. The evacuation of New Orleans became mandatory today at 8 a.m. along the vulnerable west bank of the Mississippi River, and at noon on the east bank. Nagin called GUSTAV, Page A6

Becoming dangerous

New Orleans began evacuation plans as Gustav grew into a category 4 storm with winds topping 145 mph. Hurricane Gustav LOCATION MOVEMENT MAX WIND 21.6° N NW 14 mph 145 mph 82.5° W Hurricane Warning Tropical Storm Warning/Watch Category 4



SOURCES: NOAA; ESRI AP



INSIDE

WEATHER/A9
Clear today. High of 83.
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TEARS FOR A SON
UN says Russians are keeping Georgians from their homes. See story page A4.

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Virtual bowling strikes seniors as a lot of fun

BOWLING, From A1
faces on.

The club earlier this month held a bowling tournament – timed to coincide with the Olympics – using the console, and had several players roll scores of well over 100, program coordinator Patty O'Donnell said.

“Once you get the knack of pressing two buttons at the same time, it’s as if you’re bowling,” O’Donnell said.

For seniors like Vitti, the illusion is only part of the fun.

The game, which requires players to stand in front of the TV and sweep their arms forward as if bowling, offers a chance for fun, low-impact activity, and – maybe most importantly – the chance for social interaction.

During our game, seniors cheered each other on as players scored spares and broke out in applause for the game’s lone strike, scored, unfortunately for me, by Vitti.

It’s those sort of benefits that have senior centers throughout MetroWest scrambling to get their hands on what’s already one of the hottest electronic items for kids.

At the Bellingham Senior Center, director Laura DeMattia earlier this summer was able to get a Wii on loan from one of the town’s selectmen, but the game console proved too popular. “We went ahead and purchased one,” she said.

“I would say the response has been very positive,” she said. While the social and recreational aspects of the games have struck a chord among senior center users, DeMattia believes many seniors also just want to stay in the loop when it comes to technology.

“I honestly think moreso the

driving force behind this is what people see on TV and what they experience with their families,” she said. “People who know their grandkids are using this, they seem to be very intrigued and want to compete on an even playing field. (This way) they can do it with their peers, then take it back home and show ‘em how it’s done.”

“A lot of rehabilitation places are using them to increase range of motion.”

Ruth Anne Bleakney
Milford Senior Center director

While a handful of senior centers in the region already have a Wii system, most others fall into another category: those which don’t have one, but – like most 12 year olds – desperately want one.

“We do not have one yet, but we desperately want one,” said Moira Munns of the Council on Aging in Natick.

Having a Wii at the center, she said, would open the possibility of running inter-generational programs, allowing seniors to compete with their grandchildren.

“I have heard of other councils on aging that have leagues,” she said. “I think it would be a lot of fun. If it’s part of a balanced program of activity ... I can see where it would be beneficial in some ways.”

For some, like Joanne Duffy, director of the Ashland Senior Center, the challenge isn’t in the game, it’s in finding one and making sure she can afford it.

“They’re hard to get,” she said. “Every time (we) find out, we run out to buy it, but we don’t have the budget for it.”

At a time when municipal budgets are stretched thin, even \$250 for the Wii sports games package can be tough to come up with.

“We are going to have one, ASAP,” vowed Amy Loveless, executive director of the Marlborough Council on Aging. “It’s on our short list of new fitness activities.



DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY ALLAN JUNG

Margo Theodoss laughs after scoring a strike in bowling during a Wii class at the Hudson Senior Center.

“Two years ago, we had people bowling in our main room, and we had bocce outside, but for some people it was too physical. I think (the Wii) is going to be a catalyst for, perhaps, participating more in physical activity, more social activity and I think it’s going to be good for the memory.”

Earlier this year, Hopkinton Senior Center officials applied for a grant to get a Wii, but were turned down.

“We would like one, but it’s just one of those things that just has to kind of come our way. We don’t have the budget for it,” said Assistant Director Sally Almy.

“It would be something people could do at any time – it would not need a special class,” she said. “It’s not something seniors are apt to have in their homes. I think the senior center is a good place for one.”

Milford Senior Center Director Ruth Anne Bleakney was able to find a Wii, but has so far resisted setting up the video game console because the center doesn’t have a flat-screen TV.

“From everybody I’ve talked to, they’re a lot of fun,” she said, adding that the center also invested in a “Dancing with the



DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY ALLAN JUNG

Eric Donovan, 12, of Northborough demonstrates how to bowl as he teaches a Wii class to seniors at the Hudson Senior Center.

Stars” game. “A lot of rehabilitation places are using them to increase range of motion. We have a group here that’s ready to use it. I keep telling them, ‘It’s coming, it’s coming.’”

For seniors like Vitti, the benefits are incalculable. “It’s very nice,” she said between frames of our bowling match. “I love it. We’re having fun, it’s really fun. It’s wonderful.”

And in the end, it’s harder than it looks, because while I lose, 110 to 104, I can take solace in the fact that I held my own. Next time, I’ll be ready.

Program strives to help those struggling with stigma, illness

BARRIERS, From A1

People, a Framingham agency that helps people to recover from mental illness and succeed. “I see it definitely changing, but not fast enough.”

Four clients at Programs for People, who agreed to speak with the Daily News without giving their full names, say stigma against the mentally ill is alive and well in many aspects of their lives.

Mark, who was hit by a truck in December, says he believes his diagnosis with mental illness led a doctor not to take his wishes seriously and forego surgery he requested on his badly broken leg.

“I didn’t have anybody to sign or advocate for me,” Mark said.

For Melissa, her struggles with depression and post-traumatic stress cost her ties with most of her family and wreaked havoc with jobs.

“I feel like people don’t understand,” Melissa said. “I’m labeled like you should get it, or you should have known better, so snap out of it.”

Cindy said she was called a “nutcase” when she called her son’s school to iron out a problem with a teacher. She said she encountered bias within the mental health system itself, where her own goals often seemed an afterthought to some of the people treating her.

“We want guidance,” said Cindy, “but we also want a voice.”

Bill found understanding from some

bosses, but was fired by a manager who found out about his battle with depression. When a coworker learned he had been hospitalized, he told Bill he always looked “twilighted.”

Research shows these are not isolated stories. A study published online this month in the Social Science and Medicine journal found Americans increasingly believe there are medical and genetic explanations for mental illnesses.

Yet depending on the type of illness, people were no more tolerant toward the people with these ailments than they were 10 years ago, the study said.

A new Canadian survey found only half of respondents would tell friends or coworkers if a family member was diagnosed with a mental illness, com-

pared to 72 percent for cancer. More than a quarter said they would fear being around a person with a mental disorder, despite the fact that most are not dangerous, and 46 percent said people use mental illness as an excuse for bad behavior.

In the U.S., barriers to employment keep an estimated 80 percent to 90 percent of people with mental illnesses out of the workplace, according to the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill.

This is despite the fact that one in four adults suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year, says the National Institute for Mental Health. Of those with mental illnesses, nearly half suffer from two or more disorders, according to the institute.

There are signs that stigma is changing. Pending federal legislation aims to require more equitable coverage in health plans for treatment of mental illness. Studies show more people are seeking and getting treatment, and all those interviewed at Programs for People described great progress.

“I’ve grown stronger,” Melissa said. “I’m trying to rebuild my life.”

They are speaking out against the barriers they have faced.

“I’d like people to know we’re real, and we’re not different from you or anybody else in the world,” Melissa said. “We’re equal, and we have a right to be here and not be stigmatized.”

(David Riley can be reached at 508-626-3919 or driley@cnc.com.)



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