



Wow! Jennifer Jacob, 4, pets the tail of a blue-tongued skink, a reptile native to Australia. Jennifer's mom, Deborah, looks a bit more tentative about giving the reptile a hug.



Brave: Jennifer Jacob moved on from the skink to show her mom, Deborah, a Madagascar Hissing Cockroach.

Living wonders

Kids check 'em out

A fox, tortoise, bullfrog and few cockroaches gathered at the Farmington Hills Public Library, not to check out the latest literary works but to provide greater understanding about nature.

The critters joined a carpet python, eclectus parrot and Peruvian bird-eating spider as part of Chris Percha's "Living Wonders" presentation. About 30 curious folks turned out for the exhibit.

Percha, a Commerce Township veterinarian technician, uses exotic creatures to highlight nature's unusual and splendid. A garden variety cockroach? Hardly, Percha brought along the hissing Madagascar kind.

People also had a chance to see red-eyed tree frogs and blue tongue skink. They were somewhat overshadowed by the furry Fennec fox.

"The fox is always the most popular," said Percha, who will be moving his "Living Wonders" enterprise to Florida soon. "You never see a fox, especially up close because they're such shy animals."

Percha gives 40 programs a year at schools, libraries and parks. He also works with species protection programs and is an animal/plant health inspector. He's also done animal rehabilitation.

Educator offers help to parents of troubled teens

BY JILL HOCKMAN
STAFF WRITER
jhockman@ec.homedomain.net

The 16-year-old Commerce girl was a cheerleader and a straight-A student, but her parents knew she was out of control.

The Walled Lake Central student was depressed and bulimic. And she was abusing alcohol and heroin to ease her pain.

"She was using any means to anesthetize," said the girl's step-mother, who asked not to be identified. "Our entire life revolved around getting her help."

But driving her to counseling appointments, checking her into treatment centers and enforcing strict rules at home wasn't enough.

"What do you do when your kid is trying every day possible to destroy themselves?" the girl's step-mother said. "We were not succeeding."

The final straw came when the girl came home drunk from a school basketball game.

The next morning she was on a plane headed for The DeSisto School, a Connecticut school for troubled kids. And now she's finally off drugs, her step-mother said.

"She's performing. She's communicating. She's been clean for 16 months," the step-mother said. "She's been forced to deal with her pain."

The school's founder, Michael DeSisto, will speak to local parents about parenting techniques at 7 p.m. Thursday, April 29, at Sarah Banks Middle School. The seminar is free.

A noted educator, author, therapist and lecturer, DeSisto will be in town to meet with four local families whose children attend the school.

DeSisto said his program is aimed at bright, creative, manipulative kids who have problems with eating disorders, drugs, gambling or depression.

When kids use drugs or act out in other ways, parents often pun-

ish them instead of working to find the real problem, DeSisto said. He compared the situation to a broken-down car.

"The car is making a bad noise because something is wrong with it," DeSisto said.

"A kid takes drugs for one reason - because they're uncomfortable," he said. "Kids don't know how to feel good naturally. . . . The only thing they're doing is medicating themselves to keep alive."

Instead of punishing their kids for acting out, DeSisto said, parents need to find out what's missing in their kids' lives.

"How do you teach the kid to talk to you, let you know about the emptiness and fill themselves up?" he said. "It's about learning how to love yourself."

DeSisto said his techniques are helpful for all parents - not just those who are obviously struggling with big issues like alcohol, drugs or eating disorders.

DeSisto is the author of two books: "Decoding Your Teenager," which is now out of print, and a handbook for family and adult psychotherapy. He's a frequent consultant to NBC's Today Show, and he recently taped a segment discussing the high school shooting incident in Littleton, Colo.

Those Littleton teens suspected of the school shootings are exactly the kinds of kids who might attend his school, he said.

DeSisto blamed the shooting tragedy on denial by school administrators. "They didn't know what to do with (those boys)," he said. "When we don't know what to do, we'll deny what's going on because we don't want to feel stupid."

DeSisto also said society's need to be politically correct cuts down on verbal confrontations. People don't express anger, and "nobody gets to see what's going on until it becomes explosive," he said.

(no beans about it!)



~~big~~ giant
spring savings

Take another
25%
off

merchandise already reduced
by 25 to 70%.*

Through Saturday, May 1

*Savings off original prices of selected merchandise only, as identified by signs.
Reductions taken at register. No adjustments made on prior purchases.
Excludes Fine Jewelry Consolidation Caravan.

Jacobson's

Birmingham • (248) 644-6900 Livonia • (734) 591-7696 Rochester • (248) 651-6000

SHOPPING HOURS • MON-SAT 10-9 • OPEN SUN AT NOON
Gift Certificates Complimentary Silver Gift Box Jacobson's Charge