

## OUR MENTAL HEALTH



LEN MCCULLOCH

## How and when to choose a therapist

Many years ago a psychiatrist mentor of mine told me that there used to be a law requiring a psychiatrist to have a separate door for a patient to leave his office so they wouldn't have to go out through the waiting room area and possibly be seen by someone they knew.

We have come a long way since then in our field of mental health care. Stigmas about being "in therapy" have decreased, although are not entirely eliminated. Myths still exist.

Generally, people seek the help of a mental health professional when they experience more distress in their lives than they want to continue to live with. This distress usually takes the form of anxiety and/or depression. The source of this distress can come from many places. Some are situational reactions to a life crisis or loss. Some stem from internal conflicts of an unbalanced emotional life. Some come from the stress of every day living which includes parenting, divorce, unemployment, and health problems such as traumatic brain injuries and cancer. Some come from mental illness such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder (formerly called manic depression).

When attempts to "pull yourself up by your boot straps" fail and talking to a trusted friend, family member, or clergy has not brought enough lasting relief from emotional distress, it is time to consider a mental health professional.

### Types of therapists

Under the title of "mental health professional" or "psychotherapist," there are many different types of professionals in the field. They differ in educational background, certification and licensure and by title.

**Psychologists** - In Michigan one must be licensed to practice psychology. Some clinical psychologists have earned a doctorate degree and some have studied through graduate school and hold a master's degree.

**Social workers** - In Michigan, there is certification for social workers. Typically, a social worker-psychotherapist has attained a master's degree from a graduate school of social work and has had experience in the specialty practice of psychotherapy.

**Counselors** - This category is relatively new and includes people who have graduated from a school of rehabilitation counseling. They typically specialize in counseling for persons with disabilities such as traumatic brain injuries and occupational injuries.

**Psychiatrists** - They are medical physicians who have specialized in the treatment of mental illness.

**Psychoanalysts** - These have much advanced training in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis.

**Certified counselors** - They may specialize in substance abuse counseling, gambling counseling, grief counseling, and school counseling. In Michigan we now have certification in each of these disciplines.

Finally, there is **Diplomate Status**. A diplomate is a professional from any of the above fields who has been evaluated by an objective board of their peers and has attained significant distinction in training, education, professionalism and contribution to their field, as compared to the general population of practitioners.

### Selecting a therapist

A good place to start is with your family doctor or clergy. When this is not available, a referral from a trusted friend who has had a good experience with a therapist is a way to go.

Keep in mind that it is not necessarily the academic background or the professional title that identifies a competent psychotherapist that will be a good match for you. I advise people to make

Please see HALLAM, C5



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRENSLER

Just the gang: Tucked in the sun visor of his pickup truck, Dean Unick keeps a photo taken with fellow cast members of the opera "Samson and Delilah." Dean is in the foreground, reclining.

## From toolbelt to La Traviata

### He's a carpenter by day, opera singer by night

BY ESTHER ALLWEISS TSCHIRHART  
SPECIAL WRITER

By day, Dean Unick of Farmington Hills can be found digging ditches or crawling around in attics. All that dirty work, he concedes, goes with being a carpenter and independent contractor. But after a quick shower and good-bye to his family, he's transformed like Clark Kent into his nighttime self: Opera singer with the prestigious Michigan Opera Theatre and Rackham Symphony Choir.

Unick's path to performing some of the world's most beautiful vocal works couldn't have been predicted by his early life. Musically, he

### Too Hot to Handel

What: A gospel-jazz version of the Messiah

Where: Production features soloists Rodrick Dixon, tenor; Alfredo Burke, soprano; and Vivian Cherry, mezzo-soprano, and jazz artists Marcus Belgrave, Dr. Teddy Harris Jr., Larry Nozoro and George Benson. A 36-piece orchestra will perform along with the Little Rock Baptist Church Choir and Rackham Symphony Choir.

When: 3 p.m. Sunday, March 10

Where: Little Rock Baptist Church, Woodward at Chicago, in Detroit

Tickets: \$18; \$15 in advance; \$10 for students. For information, call (313) 272-0333.

performing after raving about a dinner-theater production she'd attended. Despite working upwards of 80 hours a week, Unick was seeking a creative outlet. He auditioned for a production and 10 days later, "I was flinging coins at people's feet" as the Duke in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the musical version of Shakespeare's play, at Mercy College.

A one-line newspaper ad for auditions, spotted



Practicing: Dean Unick practices opera in the cab of his pickup truck while traveling to his day job, carpentry.

STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRENSLER

by his non-singing wife, Toni, led Unick and his bass voice to the Michigan Opera Theatre in 1983. Since his first show, *Aida*, he has continued to sing with the company at various Detroit locations, including the Music Hall, Fisher Theatre and Masonic Auditorium. "I can't say enough about the acoustics" at MOT's current home in the Detroit Opera House, he adds, where "you can be front and center, facing 3,000 seats, and people can hear every word you say."

As a member of his union, the American Guild of Musical Arts, Unick is paid for performances and every hour of rehearsal with the MOT. But he is equally enthusiastic about his unpaid vocal performances with the Rackham Symphony Choir. He joined the choir about four years ago with the show *King David*. Last fall, between the two companies, he took part in five productions. Two or three were in rehearsal while the others were staged.

Unick gives kudos to Suzanne Mallare Acton for her fine work as chorus master of the MOT. The maestro also is musical director for RSC, which is in rehearsals for *Too Hot to Handel* - a gospel-jazz version of Handel's *Messiah* - being performed March 10 at Little Rock Baptist Church in Detroit. Unick also is rehearsing for MOT's production of *Othello* in April. After these concerts, he says he plans to take some time off to be with Toni and their son Gabe, 9, and daughter Lannon, nearly 15. His outdoor interests include sailing, skiing and golfing.

For now, Unick says he's behind in learning his parts and will put in more study time with his tapes. So don't be surprised if pulling up to you in traffic sometime soon is a burly guy in a pickup truck wearing earphones, who appears to be singing his heart out.

That would be Dean Unick, opera singer.

## Local woman helps others preserve family history

BY JONI HUBERD

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Donna Ellis never thought much about preserving her family history until she lost a piece of it that she can never get back.

When her mother passed away in 1964, Ellis realized she had neglected the opportunity to ask her mother important questions about her life story.

"I found myself reflecting," the Farmington Hills resident said. "I had a lot of regrets. So in order to avoid my own family facing the same feeling, I started in 1989 capturing my own family stories."

Ultimately, the "Family Matters" project took six years to complete. Ellis wrote some, but contributions came from about 20 family members, including the children.

"It was everybody's book," Ellis said. Partly because she wanted to help others capture their life stories and partly as a tribute to her mother, Ellis became a "personal historian," helping



Donna Ellis

families, businesses and organizations with their history-saving projects. She encourages people interested in recording their personal stories to put them in a historical context, which is what one 80-year-old client did.

"She was in England during World War II, and she wanted to do her per-

sonal history) for her grandchildren. She wanted them to know her other than as 'grandma,'" Ellis said.

The woman also had a long career in the film industry, for which she received a life-time achievement award. Her story is now archived at the Farmington Library.

"When I speak to genealogical groups, one of the things I stress is genealogy begins with them, not with their parents," she said. "If there's ever going to be a connection with the future, it's got to start with you."

The most difficult situation she has encountered in her work with others has been when people say, "I have no one left to leave it to." But even for those who have no living relatives, a personal history can be important to the history of their community.

Her clients are motivated by a variety of factors. Some want to recognize a loved one's contributions, others have been through a traumatic experience, like illness, divorce or the death of a loved one. She encourages people who have been "players on the world stage"

during great events in history to document their experiences.

It can be intimidating for people to tell their own stories, and one common objection is "I'm not a writer." For those uncomfortable with writing, recorded oral interviews that can be transcribed later might be an option. Ellis also offers assistance with fact-finding research, photo journaling and can ghost write a personal history.

With experience in business management, Ellis said she is geared toward "completing and budget." She offers a variety of services - from research and writing to photo scanning and restoration - and feels a tremendous sense of accomplishment in her work.

"The most rewarding thing for me is when I receive a thank-you note," Ellis said. "That is such a tremendous pay-back."

For more information or assistance with compiling a family or personal history, contact Ellis at 248-489-1961 or via e-mail at donnabellis@hotmail.com; her Web site is www.preserveyourhistory.com on the Internet.