

Obama's amazing, but no Kennedy

The Barack Obama phenomenon is amazing.

It's like he came out of nowhere, a U.S. senator for barely three years — he was seated Jan. 4, 2005 — with a previous eight years in the Illinois legislature.

That's his experience, aside from community work in Chicago and civil rights litigation, according to his Senate Web site. He's 46, only three years older than the youngest U.S. president, John F.

Kennedy, who was 43 when he took office in 1961, the year Obama was born in Hawaii to a Kenyan father and American mother.

However, other than the closeness in age, Obama has little in common with

JFK, who definitely was not a dove. He wrote his Harvard senior thesis on "Apprehension in Munich," published as "Why England Slept," describing Britain's pre-World War II foreign policy. Kennedy enlisted in the Navy, was decorated for his service, was elected to three terms in the U.S. House before winning a Senate seat in 1952, re-election in 1958 and the presidency in 1960.

Yet here is untried Obama rolling toward the Democratic presidential nomination, barring an increasingly doubtful comeback by Hillary Clinton as of now.

The Obama bandwagon is proving irresistible to a growing number of Clinton supporters, including some super delegates, who are elected officials and other party insiders free to vote as they choose, not bound by the popular vote.

One of the super delegates, Atlanta civil rights icon Congressman John Lewis, long ago committed his support to Clinton but last week was quoted as saying he would cast his super delegate vote for Obama — the overwhelming choice of Lewis' district.

Lewis told the New York Times his vote for Obama would be cast in hope of forestalling a battle at the Democratic National Convention. However, Lewis zeroed in on "a sense of movement and a sense of spirit," apparently referring to Obama's surge of victories in primaries and caucuses.

"Something is happening in America, and people are prepared and ready to make that great leap," Lewis told the Times. He also said: "I've been very impressed with the campaign of Senator Obama. He's getting better and better every single day."

It might not be an outright endorsement but it's the next best thing, and although in comments to the AP, Lewis said he wasn't ready to abandon Clinton, his vocal support doesn't matter. What counts is his super delegate vote. And you can chalk that up to Obama unless Hillary does indeed stage a monumental comeback.

Meanwhile, Congressman David Scott, another Democrat, who represents part of Cobb, had no qualms about going with the 80 percent of his district's voters who chose Obama in the Georgia Democratic primary.

"You've got to represent the wishes of your constituency," Scott told the AP. "My proper position would be to vote the wishes of my constituents."

It's just another reason that Barack Obama is moving toward ultimately winning the Democratic nomination, surely the most amazing phenomenon ever in U.S. presidential campaigns.

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CDC probes choking 'game'

By Ashley Hungerford
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Staff Writer

MARIETTA — It's called a game. But once a player loses, there are no second chances or redos.

The choking game, also known as the blackout game, pass-out game and space monkey, is defined as self-strangulation to achieve a brief euphoric state.

In short, it's a way to get high.

But the high can be deadly when oxygen is not restored to the brain.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Thursday released a report on the choking game, the

center's first attempt to compile national data on this practice.

The CDC estimates 82 youths, ages 6 to 19, have died from the game between 1995 and 2007. Most of the deaths were boys, and the median age was 13.3 years.

But the number of deaths could be low because the CDC said no traditional public-health dataset tracks this practice and death certificates don't distinguish between choking-game deaths and other unintentional strangulation deaths. The CDC was forced to rely on media reports to estimate the incidence of death.

In 95.7 percent of the reported cases, the deaths

occurred while the youth was alone. The CDC acknowledged that, often, the parents of the child who died did not know about the choking game.

Warning signs to watch for are "mention of the choking game (or the game by its other names); bloodshot eyes; marks on the neck; frequent, severe headaches; disorientation after spending time alone; and ropes, scarves and belts tied to bedroom furniture or doorknobs or found knotted on the floor."

Cobb County Police spokesman Sgt. Dana Pierce said they do not have any incidence of death by the choking game in unincorporated Cobb.

"But we do have the training and knowledge of investigating this type of injury," he said. "We're aware of the term and what it entails."

Jeff Inman, coordinator of the Cobb County Schools Prevention and Intervention Center, said they have not seen a lot of cases of Cobb County students participating in the choking game, but that doesn't keep them from informing school officials and teachers of the warning signs.

"We tell teachers to watch



Dana Pierce

Warning signs to watch for

- mention of the choking game (or the game by its other names)
- bloodshot eyes
- marks on the neck
- frequent, severe headaches
- disorientation after spending time alone
- ropes, scarves and belts tied to bedroom furniture or doorknobs or found knotted on the floor

for red marks around the neck and if the student seems to be out of it for no apparent reason," Inman said.

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Don McKee

MDJ COLUMNIST



Staff photo by Laura Moon

Public Relations Captain Corynne Leduc, left, consults with team captain Trey Chambers, kneeling, about the graphics that will be on the robot as senior Zac Monea listens.

Making new friends

Wheeler students creating robot for competition

By Elizabeth Farnsworth
Marietta Daily Journal
Staff Writer

MARIETTA — It's Thursday afternoon, and students are stressed. There are six days left. To do? Add an arm and finish building the wrist.

Students at Wheeler High School are serious about their robotics. They're working hard to wrap things up before they have to ship this spring's project, a 100-pound-plus robot. Teams have six weeks to design and build a robot that can race around a tennis-court sized track, pick up a waist-high, 10-pound ball and toss it over a six-and-a-half foot bar. The task sounds daunting to unini-

tiated ears, but for these kids, it's do-able.

Kell High School also has a robotics team. Both programs are planning to compete in the FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics Peachtree Regional, to be conducted March 14 and 15 at the Gwinnett Civic Center. Together, Kell and Wheeler boast the only high-level FIRST teams in Cobb County.

"We are engaged in a competition of the mind," said Ed Barker, the head coach of Kell's FIRST team. "We're trying to change cultural perceptions about engineering and science."

About 28 Kell students are involved in FIRST, half of whom are girls. The group almost perfectly

reflects the demographics of Kell in both race and gender, he said.

At Wheeler, Cindy Wang, 16, is a junior. Miss Wang, who lives in Marietta, said robotics have helped her to become more confident. She's learning to do electronics, and often works with graphics.

"These minds are brilliant. They're helping technology get to the next level," she said. "Electronics is like puzzle pieces for me," she said.

Anthony Kinnell, 17, is a Wheeler senior from Powder Springs. He's enrolled in Wheeler's magnet program, and said the school's robotics program — robotics is Wheeler's largest

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BOC to discuss unrelated tenants

By Kelly Brooks
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MARIETTA — Since passing restrictions on boarding houses last summer, the Cobb Board of Commissioners on Tuesday will hear some of the first land-use permit applications that would allow more than two unrelated people to occupy homes.

Applicants Gary Binette and his son, Derek Binette, own one home each near the northwest end of the college campus, on Frey Lake Road in northwest Cobb. They bought the homes as an investment, both said, and rent them to students.

Derek Binette, 25, a KSU graduate, said he lives in the home his father owns, along with his brother and two friends. The home he owns, which is two doors down, is rented to four university students, he said.

Last July, Cobb Commissioners unanimously approved code changes that allow only two non-family members and their children or grandchildren to live in a home. The changes also require each adult occupant to have 390 square feet of living space, rather than 50

square feet of sleeping space. Last fall, KSU enrolled more than 20,000 students. For years, nearby residents like Colleen Anzalone

have tried to coexist with the expanding school.

Ms. Anzalone and several other residents spoke in opposition last week to three or more unrelated people occupying a single home in the area.

"We know this is an institution, but we want to

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Refinery had small explosion earlier

By Russ Bynum
Associated Press Writer

SAVANNAH — Dust collected in a piece of safety equipment caused a small explosion at a sugar refinery weeks before sugar dust beneath the plant's silos ignited to cause the deadly blast that killed nine workers, a federal investigator said Sunday.

Stephen Selk, investiga-

tions manager for the U.S. Chemical Safety Board, had few details about the previous explosion at the Imperial Sugar refinery in near-by Port Wentworth. He could not say

whether the earlier blast contributed to the massive explosion Feb. 7.

"It is far too early to reach conclusions about the relationship between that event and this one," Selk said.

Selk said no one was injured in the earlier explosion. He did not know the

exact date, but said it happened "weeks ago."

The Chemical Safety Board investigates industrial accidents for the federal government and makes safety recommendations to industry and trade groups as well as federal regulators.

It has just begun looking into the refinery blast after criminal investigators determined Friday the explosion was accidental — caused by

clouds of tiny sugar dust particles that, when airborne in confined spaces, can ignite like gunpowder. Selk said the refinery was equipped with a network of fans

and ducts designed to prevent dust explosions by sucking particles out of the plant and transferring them to dust collectors on the roof.

Ironically, it was one of those rooftop dust bins that

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