



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

Volume 9 Number 2

www.ntskeptics.org

February 1995

In this month's issue:

- [Healthy Skepticism](#)
- [Creationist text urged for Plano schools](#)

Healthy Skepticism

Worldlife company hypes new fraud

By Tim Gorski, M.D.

David Magee, who a few months ago was promoting an oral chelation therapy product "Athechel" as the "miracle" treatment that saved him from coronary atherosclerosis and "protect[s] against *every* [emphasis in the original] known disease," is now making similar claims for his "AMARANTHINE[®]." The product is sold through the same Albuquerque, New Mexico, firm, The Worldlife Company, which says that it "makes no health or medical claims nor offers any instructions for use of any product."

Yet the accompanying promotional materials have Mr. Magee claiming that he had been diagnosed with 96-98% occlusion of his coronary arteries. Then, after using the product, he says, "My doctor rechecked my blocked arteries and almost fainted. He tells me to forget about my earlier scheduled bypass surgery. I don't need it." Numerous additional health claims are made for the remedy and its constituents.

AMARANTHINE[®] is said to contain Chlorella algae (see the September 1994 *Skeptic*), S.O.D. (superoxide dismutase), Ginko [sic] extract, and selenium. Superoxide dismutase is an enzyme that catalyzes (accelerates) the conversion of highly reactive superoxide radicals (O₂⁻) into hydrogen peroxide and oxygen. As a protein molecule, it would undergo degradation to its constituent amino acids when taken orally. Yet it's referred to by the promotional material as "a miracle vitamin" and "the anti-aging nutrient," as well as the neologism "orgotein." Even more bizarre are the assertions that S.O.D. "contains catalase," which is actually an altogether different enzyme, and that S.O.D.'s containing copper "certainly explains some of its successful arthritis-control properties." This, because quacks of the past used to sell ineffective copper bracelets to arthritis sufferers!

The inclusion of Ginko [sic; presumably *Ginkgo biloba* is meant] seems to be on the basis of something like sympathetic magic because of its being "the oldest living tree on earth." The botanical is also claimed to be a "brain tonic" that's alleged to increase blood flow and oxygen to this organ. Yet *Natural Product Medicine* by Marderosian and Liberti, while noting that Ginkgo extracts can increase blood flow, state that "*vasoconstriction* [their emphasis — it means a *reduction* in blood flow] can occur . . . especially when cerebral vessels are already maximally dilated." It also happens, state these authors, that "contact with whole ginkgo plants has been associated with severe allergic reactions. A

cross-allergenicity exists between ginkgo fruit pulp and poison ivy." Selenium is claimed to be a general cancer preventative.

Besides that of Mr. Magee, the usual testimonials are offered, along with the "money back if not 100% pleased" guarantee. A month's supply of the product is offered at \$32.95 postpaid, which is elsewhere referred to as "pennies a day!"

This information is provided by the D/FW Council Against Health Fraud. For more information, or to report suspected health fraud, please contact the Council at Box 202577, Arlington, TX 76006, or call metro 817-792-2000. Dr. Gorski is a practicing physician, chairman of the D/FW Council Against Health Fraud and a North Texas Skeptics Technical Advisor.

Creationist text urged for Plano schools

By Mike Sullivan and Joe Voelkering

PLANO, Texas: A Creationist textbook is being promoted by three school trustees to supplement biology texts in the Plano, Texas, public high school science classes. The book, *Of Pandas and People: The Central Question of Biological Origins* (Second Edition), is being promoted by three members of the Board who want to spend district funds to make the book available to all Plano high school biology teachers. An organized group of about 75 Plano parents opposed to the book's use in science classes has asked the North Texas Skeptics and others for help in mounting their opposition to using the book in the large suburban Dallas district.

Plano Independent School District trustees Tom Wilds, Don Mills and Gary Clark want the district to authorize the purchase of a copy of the clearly Creationist *Pandas* text for every biology teacher in the district. Teachers may then request the book for use in their classrooms, and district funds would be used for their purchase. At least one other trustee, Judy Coppolo, has been quoted as being in favor of *Pandas*. With Mills, Clark, Wilds and Coppolo all supporting *Pandas*, the seven-member board could vote to approve the purchase at their meeting on February 7. There are approximately 3,000 biology students currently in the Plano ISD, so the district may eventually fund the purchase of many copies of *Pandas* if the board votes to adopt the text.

By having the board authorize samples of *Pandas* to be acquired with district funds, and then to use district funds to purchase quantities of the books for students if requested by a teacher as a supplemental text, the usual textbook review process that would be carried out if a *teacher* had *requested* the book from the outset can be averted, Wilds revealed in a telephone interview. Texas state funds could not be used to purchase *Pandas* since the book is not on the state-approved list.

Pandas, published by the Richardson-based Foundation for Thought and Ethics, has been widely criticized by science education groups, biologists and several religious groups as being a thinly-veiled promotion of special creation over evolution theory, substituting the euphemism "intelligent designer" for God. The nature of the claimed "intelligent designer" is not described in *Pandas*, but readers are led to think that it is a supernatural being unknown to science. It also claims that complex "designs" in Nature cannot be explained by evolution theory, and that therefore, such organisms must have been created *ex nihilo* by the hand of the "intelligent designer."

In a front-page story in the January 13 edition of *The Dallas Morning News*, Wilds is quoted as saying "Darwinism is full of holes, and we shouldn't be teaching it as gospel truth. This [*Pandas*] brings out other possibilities for how our universe got started without pushing any philosophy or theology." As best as can be determined independently, *Pandas* is not in actual classroom use in any public school biology curriculum in America. The publisher refuses to give the names of any of the districts they claim are using the text in science classes. *Pandas* has been rejected in widely-reported cases in California, Idaho, and Alabama.

***Pandas* rejected in another metroplex district**

The *Pandas* pandemonium has already been met and dealt with in another large Dallas-area school district. Officials in this large Dallas suburban district, contacted by NTS and who spoke on the condition that their district not be identified, received a request to use *Pandas* as a supplemental text by one of their biology teachers, and the administrators handled the investigation into the book's appropriateness aggressively.

First, school officials conducted an extensive academic review of the book and received materials from informed science education advocacy groups like the National Center for Science Education; they read a review of the science posited in *Pandas* by Dr. Frank Sonleitner, associate professor of zoology, University of Oklahoma; and they solicited information from every other public school district they could find which had considered adoption of the *Pandas* text. They told NTS that this study resulted in two findings: not a single public school district could be located which had approved the book for use in science classes; and that the book failed the publisher's claim that it is a science textbook.

Next, the district's legal counsel reviewed all the legal cases applicable to the adoption of *Pandas*. They found that case law supported the idea that *Panda's* "intelligent designer" was a euphemism for a Creator, thereby making *Panda's* content comparable to proselytizing, and so barring it from use in public school science classes based on the First Amendment's establishment clause.

Most notably, the officials defended their rejection of the *Pandas* text based on their fiduciary responsibility to district taxpayers. They reasoned that if *Pandas* were adopted, a legal challenge to the book would be a near-certainty. They would then be faced with the prospect of defending a court challenge to the use of the book, resulting in significant expenditure of taxpayer funds in the legal defense.

Apart from the fairly minor cost of the books themselves, these officials were mindful of the financial exposure adoption of *Pandas* would mean to their district from the legal issues sure to follow. "I feel that the actions of this administration are an example of how the review process should work, and that they should be commended for their very high academic and ethical standards," North Texas Skeptics President Joe Voelkering said.

Plano officials may face the legal challenge averted by that district, should *Pandas* be adopted for use in the Plano schools. Other local school officials told NTS that they are sure that *Pandas* will be tested in court somewhere in Texas, and most likely in the Metroplex. They fear that if the Plano challenge fails, their large suburban district may be the next one faced with the *Pandas* controversy. Research by NTS has disclosed that there is legal precedent for individual board members being held responsible for liability when advancing their own views through their actions on the board in such cases.

Plano parents, NTS respond

A group of Plano parents organized last August under the name Keep Quality in Plano Schools (KQUIPS) shortly after the board elections that brought Mills, Clark and Wilds to office. Soon after those elections, the Board ended the demonstration of condom use for birth control and disease control in Plano high school biology classes and passed a resolution advocating the teaching of "traditional morals" in the public schools.

Evelyn Peelle, the vice-president and a board member of the KQUIPS group, is no stranger to good science. She has earned a B.S. in Engineering and a B.A. in Chemistry from Swarthmore College, and has completed work towards a Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering. Yet she and other KQUIPS members have sought and accepted help on the *Pandas* issue from groups more familiar with dealing with Creationist issues in public schools.

Contacted by NTS President Joe Voelkering, Peelle and KQUIPS spokesperson Nancy Machen were eager to receive information on how their group could mount a challenge to the *Pandas* initiative. Voelkering was able to brief the two on the general background of the *Pandas* book and steer the group towards another school board that has already met and turned back the pseudoscience of *Pandas*.

NTS has also offered KQUIPS the expertise of NTS Directors Emeritus and co-founders John Thomas and Ronnie Hastings. Thomas is a practicing attorney with an undergraduate degree in physics from UT, and Hastings is the chairman of the Science department and a teacher of advanced mathematics and physics at Waxahachie High School and earned his Ph.D. in physics from Texas A&M. Both men are familiar with Creationist tactics, case law, the pseudoscientific arguments from design, the poor science offered in *Pandas*, and other issues concerning the Creationist

movement. Hastings also served on the committee that approved the science textbooks now in use in Texas public schools. In addition, NTS Technical Advisors Ray Eve and Frank Harrold have been contacted about the Plano issue. The two associate professors at UT-Arlington authored a book on the Creationist phenomenon, titled "The Creationist Movement in Modern America" from Twayne Publishers, Boston.

Wilds' ideas on science education

Peelle, Machen and the KQUIPS parents will have an uphill battle on their hands to keep quality science education in biology classes in Plano, if the transcript of a telephone interview of trustee Wilds by Peelle and supplied to *The Skeptic* is any indication. In it, Wilds:

admits that he can't remember much of anything from his college biology classes;

that he is in favor of each biology teacher in the district being able to decide whether to use *Pandas* in their classroom on a teacher-by-teacher basis;

that he sees no reason why a teacher shouldn't be able to use *Pandas* in science class if district funds aren't involved;

that students are well-served in science education by exposing them to various views about important topics and leaving it to the students to sort out which are valid and which aren't;

and that he would consider any significant opposition to the *Pandas* book by parents or scientists to be secondary to an individual teacher's desire to use the text.

KQUIPS has mounted a letter-writing campaign and plans to turn out in force at the February 7th meeting to voice their concern over *Pandas*. NTS members who pay property taxes in Plano ISD or who have children attending public school in Plano have a valid reason to voice their concern as well, and support the continuation of quality science education in Plano without the pseudoscience promoted in *Pandas*.

As one of the largest and richest school districts in the state, Plano students deserve better than to have Creationist propaganda offered to them in science classes as being equivalent to the accepted views of real science. Imagine what a Plano high school graduate would face on their first day of college-level biology at The University of Texas, for example, when their professor tells them that none of what they were led to believe in *Pandas* has anything to do with the real world of biology and the life sciences. They will start off their college career at a deficit, for no good reason, simply because some Plano school trustees don't understand the difference between legitimate science and theology that comes wrapped in scientific terms.