

Scaring up ratings



KEN GEORGE, ABC/The Associated Press

Joely Richardson stars in "Fatal Contact: Bird Flu in America," airing at 8 tonight.

Bird flu spreads to small screen

By ANDREW BRIDGES
Associated Press writer

Bodies piling up so quickly it takes dump trucks to haul them away. Barbed wire to keep whole neighborhoods quarantined. It's Hollywood's version of bird flu, a blur of fact and fiction that some scientists say could confuse the public.

"Fatal Contact: Bird Flu in America," an ABC made-for-television movie, airs tonight, just as scientists are to begin testing of wild birds in Alaska that could herald the arrival of bird flu in North America. Scientists fear the bird flu virus could evolve so it could be passed from human to human, sparking a global pandemic.

The two-hour movie plays up that notion to the fullest, with a running ticker that tallies tens of millions of victims worldwide. In one scene, the bodies are thrown on a pyre, like the carcasses of cows torched in the 2001 foot-and-mouth disease outbreak in Great Britain. The producers of the movie, from the writer of 2002's "Atomic Twister," bill their work as a "thinking man's disaster film."

"We call this a plausible, worst-case scenario. This could actually happen. It may not be this bad but it could be this bad. The reason to portray it this way is to kind of give a wake-up call to everyone and this is something we shouldn't ignore and we should be as prepared as we should be," said Diana Kerew, one of the movie's executive producers.

Bird flu expert Michael Osterholm said the movie realistically portrays the shortages of goods and services, and some of the ensuing panic, that could occur in a pandemic. But Osterholm frets the blurring of information and entertainment could do the public a disservice and hopes to arrange a conference call with television critics before the movie airs to set the record straight. He singled out for criticism how the movie shows Virginia officials using barbed wire to fence off and quarantine entire neighborhoods.

"This is too far important an issue to create further confusion in the public's mind," said Osterholm, who directs the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota.

For the record, a spokesman for Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine said the commonwealth has no plans to roll out cyclone fences and barbed wire. "We haven't done that since, oh, the '50s," joked Kevin Hall.

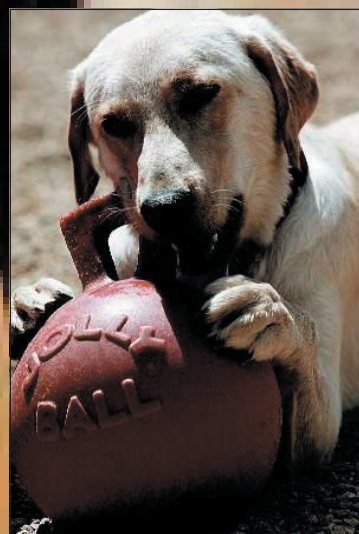
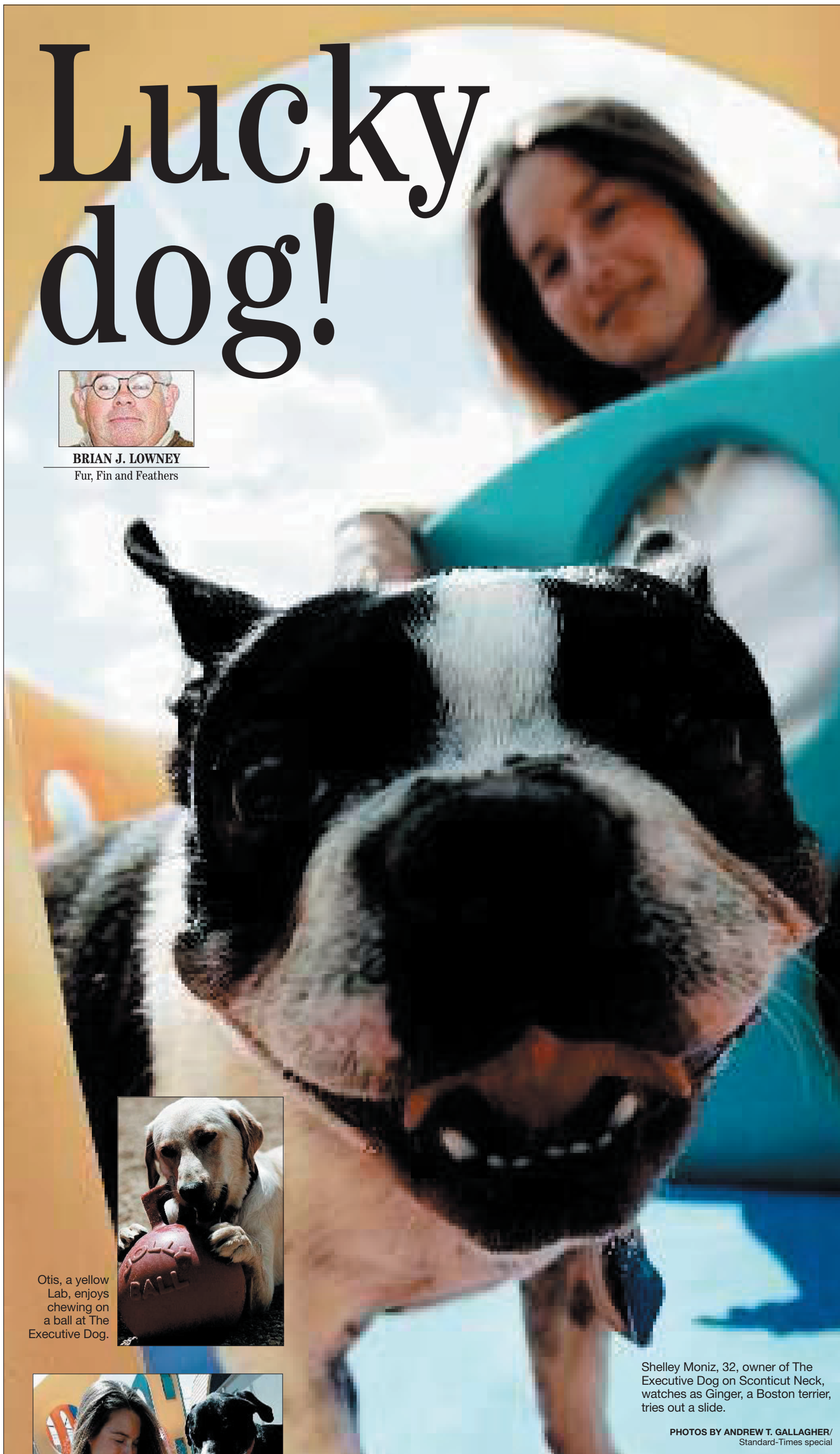
"Fatal Contact" begins in China, where — in the movie — the bird flu virus has mutated to the point where it's being passed human to human. It's only when an American businessman — "patient

See **BIRD FLU B2**

Lucky dog!



BRIAN J. LOWNEY
Fur, Fin and Feathers



Otis, a yellow Lab, enjoys chewing on a ball at The Executive Dog.



Ms. Moniz is surrounded by her charges. Her doggie day-care center opened May 1. It also provides a number of other services, from grooming to training.

Shelley Moniz, 32, owner of The Executive Dog on Sconticut Neck, watches as Ginger, a Boston terrier, tries out a slide.

PHOTOS BY ANDREW T. GALLAGHER/
Standard-Times special

New day-care center in Fairhaven offers pooches plenty of opportunities to play and learn

Every dog deserves to have a little fun.

That's the concept behind The Executive Dog, a new doggie day-care center that opened May 1 in Fairhaven.

"We provide a cage-less environment for dogs to play and learn," says Shelley Moniz, 32, a Fairhaven native and owner of the Sconticut

Neck facility. In addition to providing day care for dogs of all sizes and ages, Ms. Moniz also offers basic grooming and bathing.

Applications are currently being accepted for training classes, which will begin in a few weeks under the direction of Ruth Smiler, a well-known local animal behaviorist and trainer.

Future plans for the center also include a small retail shop that will sell training aids, natural dog food and treats,

and breed-themed gifts and collectibles.

Ms. Moniz, the owner of a Parson Jack Russell terrier named Schooner and a yellow Lab that answers to the name Otter, has always loved animals. Her grandfather, Joseph Moniz, bred hunting beagles for many years.

"I grew up with many pets, from ducks to mice," she recalls. "There were always dogs and cats."

After graduating from

See **LUCKY B2**

Bird flu: Scaring up ratings

CONTINUED FROM B1
zero" — prepares to catch a flight out of Hong Kong, after crossing paths with an infected factory worker, that the global pandemic really gets started. Playing supporting roles are a wadded-up cocktail napkin, stuffed olive and an apparently less-than-sterile martini.

The movie suggests the Richmond, Va., businessman infects several dozen airline passengers, who scatter around the globe. Viewers may never accept a hot towel from a flight attendant again.

Health officials catch on quickly, but apparently are slow to tell the rest of us. At least two weeks pass before the president bothers to let on that it's the 1918 flu pandemic all over again.

That apparently didn't faze the dozen or so Department of Health and Human Services officials who screened the film at the request of The Associated Press.

Dr. Bruce Gellin, director of the National Vaccine Program office, praised the movie's timeliness in raising public awareness of bird flu, as well as its portrayal of "a number of potentially realistic scenarios." Those include the limited availability of antiviral medicines in a pandemic, the months it could take to develop an effective vaccine and in turn how the United States could be dependent on other countries — yes, that means France — to provide vaccine. The movie's stressing of the importance of planning

also won kudos from the department.

ABC will broadcast the movie during sweeps, when networks often trot out scare fare to boost the ratings that help determine local advertising rates. The network isn't pushing "Fatal Contact" hard but has played up the bona fides of the movie, which it claims was "meticulously researched."

"There's a lot of science in the movie about why this would be scary if this were to arrive. Unfortunately, in our scenario, it is too late to stop the spread and that is what is being predicted by scientists if this were to occur," said Judith Verno, who co-produced the movie with Kerew for Sony Pictures Television.

The filmmakers even brought in historian John Barry, author of the best-selling book "The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History," to review the script and make suggestions. Barry, in a telephone interview, said his involvement was much more limited than ABC has suggested. He did, however, dissuade them from showing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as having its own fleet of jets.

"I have some problems with it," Barry said. "It's certainly not a documentary."

'TELL ME A STORY'

BY AMY FRIEDMAN, ILLUSTRATED BY JILLIAN GILLILAND

The Buffalo Boy and the Banyan Tree

A legend from Vietnam

Look up — there, in the moon, is a spreading banyan tree and a young man. The man's name is Cuoi, and when he was young, long before he lived on the moon, he was a regular boy who lived on Earth like other boys. And like many boys, Cuoi liked to tell little white lies, and sometimes he told big lies, too. As time passed, he became known as a troublemaker.

One day, when Cuoi was supposed to be tending the buffalo of a rich farmer, he decided he would rather play. And so, as he often did, he escaped into the forest where no one would find him. He soon forgot about his chores and tasks. Instead he wandered, staring idly at the footprints he left in the damp earth as he walked.

When he grew tired, he lay down beneath a banyan tree and squinted up at the sun and at the birds dancing in the cool autumn wind.

Presently a whimpering noise coming from a nearby thicket attracted his attention. Cautiously he stood up and tiptoed toward the sound. He pushed aside some leaves and spotted four little tiger cubs lying there.

Cuoi knelt down beside the cubs and began to play with them. He tickled their bellies and chins; he laughed as they tumbled and rolled over each other.

And then, because he so loved pranks, Cuoi began to tease the cubs. He lifted one of the little creatures high into the air, dangling him over his brothers and sisters who stared up helplessly.

Just then Cuoi heard something padding through the undergrowth and a low growling sound. Frantic, he dropped the cub to the ground, where it fell with a

thud. Knowing what would happen if the mother of the cubs found him, he raced to the banyan tree and scrambled up the trunk. Just as he reached the top, the tigress appeared, and when she discovered her injured cub, she growled in anguish.

High up in the tree, hidden behind the spreading leaves, Cuoi could hear sorrow and fury in that growl. He held his breath and sat as quietly as he could, terrified she would discover he was the culprit who had harmed her cub.

But then the tigress did something strange. She turned around and walked to a small banyan sapling growing close to the tree in which he hid. Cuoi trembled as she bit off several leaves, but apparently she did not see or hear or smell him. She simply began to chew upon those leaves, and then she walked to her cub and placed the matted leaves inside the cub's mouth.

Cuoi watched in amazement as the lifeless cub opened his eyes, and within a few minutes, got up on his own and began to run about. Cuoi let out a small sigh of relief, for the cub was healed.

So those leaves are magic, Cuoi thought. I could do many things with such a tree.

When the tigress saw that her cub was well, she carried all four into the forest to find a safer hiding place.

Cuoi waited until nightfall, when he was certain the tigress and her cubs were far away. He climbed down the tree. He grabbed the slim trunk of sapling banyan nearby, pulled it up by its roots and hurried home. There, beside his house, he planted that tree.

The next day Cuoi cured one of his friends of an illness no one could cure simply by offering him some banyan leaves mixed in a cup of tea.



And after he had cured many sick people, he became famous throughout his village and elsewhere for his ability to heal even the most difficult cases.

Meanwhile, the little sapling flourished and grew rapidly in size. As time passed, Cuoi became quite prosperous and acquired the title of "miracle doctor."

Some years later, when he revived the daughter of a village leader, he asked the hand of the daughter in marriage, instead of a fee. The daughter was overjoyed, for Cuoi was thought by everyone to be a young man of great promise. And so they married.

The trouble was, Cuoi had not changed altogether, and after a while his wife became annoyed at his lazy ways and at the tricks he still played. She became frustrated, too, by the love he lavished upon his tree. He seemed far more attentive to it than to her.

One day as Cuoi was leaving to pay a visit to a sick neighbor, he turned to his wife and said, "Make certain you take care of my tree while I'm gone."

This was the last straw. The moment Cuoi was out of sight, his wife carried a huge bucket of soapy, dirty water to the tree and poured it on the roots.

The tree began to shake and

shudder, and she was alarmed to see, in the next moment, the tree tearing itself out of the ground. Up and up it pulled, and the roots rose out of the ground amid a shower of dirt and pebbles.

Cuoi happened to return just at that moment, for he had forgotten something, and there was his precious tree, beginning to rise into the sky!

"Stop, stop, you mustn't leave me," Cuoi cried. He knew if he did not have the magical banyan, he would lose his status and respect. "Wait," he cried, and he ran as fast as he could toward the tree and grabbed onto its roots.

But Cuoi was not nearly heavy enough to hold that tree to the ground, and so it carried him up and up, all the way into the sky and onto the moon, where he and the tree live to this day.

Some people in Vietnam believe that each autumn a few leaves from that banyan tree fall to Earth. They say whoever is lucky enough to find one of those leaves will be able to heal sickness just the way Cuoi did so long ago. And so, if you are walking along and a leaf lands on you, be careful with it. It may be a leaf from the tree on the moon.

HEALTH AND SUPPORT LISTINGS

HEALTH

FREE VASCULAR SCREENINGS:

Offered by Southcoast Hospitals Group, 5-7 p.m. select Tuesdays in May and June. Appointments required; call (800) 497-1727. St. Luke's Hospital, 101 Page St., New Bedford.

ASK A DIETITIAN:

Presented by the Diabetes Association Inc. Certified diabetes educator Norma Mello will discuss diabetes management and answer questions, 6:30 p.m. May 10. Free. To register, call Rosa Oliveira at (508) 672-5671. Diabetes Association Inc., 170 Pleasant St., Fall River.

FREE PROSTATE SCREENINGS:

Offered by Southcoast Hospitals Group, 5-8 p.m. May 22 at the Jarabek Center at Charlton Memorial Hospital. Prostate cancer screening tests consist of the prostate specific antigen (PSA) test and a digital rectal exam. Screening is recommended for men over the age of 50, African-American men over the age of 40 and men with a family history of prostate cancer. Call (508) 679-7056 for an appointment. 363 Highland Ave., Fall River.

FREE SKIN CANCER SCREENINGS:

5-7 p.m. May 10-

11 at the Hudner Oncology Center at Saint Anne's Hospital. Appointments required; call Caritas DoctorFinder toll-free at (800) 488-5959. Fall River.

'FREEDOM FROM SMOKING' PROGRAM:

Eight-week smoking cessation program begins May 9 with a free orientation program at 5 p.m. in the Cardiac Rehabilitation Suite at Saint Anne's Hospital. \$25 for eight weeks, materials included. Appointments required; call Dixie Tavares at (508) 674-5600, Ext. 2392. Fall River.

SUPPORT

FREE BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUP:

Sponsored by Allegiance Hospice, 6:30-8 p.m. first/third Thursdays. For details or to register, call Mark Hurd at (877) 255-4623. Welby Road, New Bedford.

PARKINSONS SUPPORT GROUP:

Meets 1 p.m. second Thursdays at Dartmouth Council on Aging. On May 11, Jim Westerkamp will speak on DBS (deep brain stimulation). Dartmouth Street, Dartmouth.

FAMILY NONVIOLENCE INC.:

Offers The Next Step, a divorce support group, and Men's Support Group, for men abused in partner relationships. Groups are now forming; call (508) 996-1100 to

register. First Congregational Church, Fairhaven.

SOUTHCOAST MOTHERS OF MULTIPLE CLUB:

Support group for mothers of twins or multiples, meets 7 p.m. second Wednesdays. Meetings may feature guest speakers, social events for moms and family events ("Women's Health," May 10). For details, call Dawn Machado at (774) 930-9680.

Fairhaven.

FAMILY EDUCATION SERIES:

Offered by Corrigan Mental Health Center, 5:45 p.m. Wednesdays for eight weeks. Attorney Linda Barlow will present "A Legal Overview of Guardianships, Medications and Commitments," May 10. Free hour-long sessions include open question-and-answer period and refreshments. Pre-registration not required. For details,

call Elaine at (508) 235-7339. 49 Hillside St., Fall River.

CELIAC SPRUE SUPPORT GROUP:

Informational meeting, 2 p.m. May 21, features "hands on" class on making pizza from scratch and from prepared crusts. Registration at 1:30 p.m. For reservations, call Kathi at (401) 624-8888.

FOOD ADDICTS IN RECOVERY (FA):

Twelve-step program for

overeating, bulimia and anorexia. Public information meetings, 7 p.m. May 16 and 8 a.m. May 19 at the Church of the Good Shepherd, 74 High St., Wareham (lower rear) and 6:30 p.m. May 21 at St. Joseph's Church, 17 Spring St., Adams and Spring streets, Fairhaven. Open to everyone, including those who think they may have a food problem or are concerned about someone else who may. No dues, fees or weigh-ins. For details, call (781) 321-9118.

Lucky: New day-care center offers pooches plenty of opportunities to play and learn

CONTINUED FROM B1
UMass Dartmouth, the busy entrepreneur held a variety of jobs, including chief operating officer of a Providence-based company. "I was kind of disgusted with the corporate rat race," Ms. Moniz admits, adding that owning the day-care center allows her to combine a strong business and marketing background with her love of canines.

"I always wanted to work with animals and I even looked into vet school," she says. Before opening The

Executive Dog, Ms. Moniz visited similar facilities throughout the Northeast. Some, she says, were well-run and clean, while others were chaotic. She made note of the facilities she'd like to emulate and learned from the ones she'd sooner forget.

"It's important to have cleanliness," she says. "These pets are people's children."

Before a dog is allowed to enter the day-care program, which is available weekdays from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., its owner must complete a three-page

application and the dog participate in a free half-day evaluation session.

During the evaluation, Ms. Moniz touches the animal's paws and ears to see how the dog reacts to humans, and then introduces the canine to other members of its intended group.

Groups are divided according to their level of activity, personality and age. For example, an aged dachshund won't be placed with a lively Labrador puppy, but might interact with an

equally tranquil Pekinese. While some dogs quickly adjust, others might not be cut out for the group dynamic.

"There are some dogs that I just can't take," Ms. Moniz laments. "The dog must be people friendly, as well as dog friendly. They have to play well with others."

Boarders at The Executive Dog must also be up to date on all vaccinations, take heartworm medications, be free of fleas and ticks and, if older than 8 months, must be spayed or neutered. (The

only exceptions to the latter requirement are show dogs, which can't be altered.)

Day-care rates begin at \$20 and multi-day packages are available for further discounted rates.

Ms. Moniz is certified in animal emergency first aid and CPR, and is enrolled in a correspondence course offered by the Animal Behavior College in California. She also volunteers at the Potter League Shelter in Middletown, R.I.

She believes that dog day care is the perfect solution

for working owners who don't want to leave their dogs alone at home all day, or for those people who need someone to look after Rover while they are off on a day trip or recuperating from surgery and don't have the stamina to walk a dog two or three times a day.

Dogs that spend a day at the facility will be just as tired as their owner at the end of the day, Ms. Moniz says.

"Their master will be curled up on the couch watching TV and the dog will be sleeping on the floor next to him," she says with a laugh. That's because her day-care dogs follow a routine that includes a balance of play and nap time, as well as a break for treats and snacks.

At nap time, the dogs curl up on thick mats in individual crates. Ms. Moniz credits her grandfather for completing most of the building's renovations, and her fiancé, Duffy McCarthy, and family members for helping with small projects and offering moral support.

A friend, Jill Macolini, painted the center's large murals, with representations of many breeds, including a life-like Dalmatian and an aristocratic-looking Boston terrier.

The day-care center has a 3,500-square-foot fenced-in yard, and a 2,500-square-foot interior that provide dogs with a lot of room to romp and play.

"A lot of the owners who leave their dogs here are executives," Ms. Moniz says, "so why can't their dogs be executive dogs for a day?"

For more information, call (508) 990-7070 or visit the Web site, www.executivedog.com. The facility is located at 105 Sciticut Neck Road.

All of Brian's columns are available online in our new pet section. Visit <http://pets.SouthCoastToday.com>

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