
'Healing' cards offered to victims | Some dismiss claims of power as quackery:[2,6,7 Edition]

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Full Text (828 words)

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JULIAN -- The recent fires have attracted many people wanting to help the victims.

But the most unusual have to be the men offering the use of laminated cards that they call "healing instruments," and that they say ease stress and restore a trauma victim's emotional strength.

Use of the cards is free, and there are no strings attached. But buying one of the cards for regular use, and becoming an "instrument keeper," is something else. The cards cost from \$250 to \$350, depending on the "power." Other instruments range from \$560 for a "healing puck" to \$8,600 for the "healing bar," which is described as using the most advanced technology.

The founders of the organization that manufactures the devices make them with knowledge gained through "telepathic impressions in the form of engineering blueprints" from "a place outside of this Earth and its astral system." In addition to mental and emotional benefits, the instruments also are supposed to relieve pain.

Others dismiss the claims as quackery, and say the organization is taking advantage of traumatized or desperate people.

"I think this is how most quackery happens," said Dr. Robert Baratz, president of the National Council Against Health Fraud, a nonprofit group based in Massachusetts.

"They find people who are desperate and ingratiate themselves to these people and then take advantage of them down the road."

The devices are manufactured by The Gentle Wind Project in Kittery, Maine. The group was formed 20 years ago, said Mary Miller, its co-director.

The project counts more than 3 million people around the world who have used the instruments. There are 12,000 instrument keepers in the country, with hundreds in California. The catalog of such instruments suggests donations for each device, but Miller, one of the project's founders, said it has given away instruments to those in need who cannot pay.

The instrument keepers do not gain anything when they find new keepers, Miller said.

"There's no financial or personal benefit to anybody when someone becomes an instrument keeper," she said.

"This is an honest thing. There are no strings attached. Nobody is going to chase people down or anything. We just want them to have a better life."

There is little explanation of how the cards supposedly work, or about what is inside them. Printed circuits, minerals, cell salts, gems and herbs are among the components mentioned.

"The way they work is extremely complex and cannot be understood by anyone in humanity at this time," according to the project's Web site, www.gentlewindproject.org.

"Remember," the site says, "most people have no idea where their electricity comes from, how their radios, televisions, or satellite GPS systems work, let alone the complexity of high-frequency temporal shifting matrixed with millions of pre-defined etheric modifications operating in a vertically and horizontally oriented polarization."

"Gobbledygook," is how Baratz described the explanation.

"It's classic nonsense," he said. "High-sounding phrases that mean nothing."

If no one can understand how it works, Baratz said, how can it be tested?

Nathan Kaufman, one of two instrument keepers who have been traveling to areas burned by the recent fires, said the cards have proved their worth. Kaufman said he has seen the difference the cards make in other people -- and in himself.

Five years ago, Kaufman said, he was a 70-year-old alcoholic. He tried holding a card that was offered to him by a friend.

"I started noticing little things, changes in my life," Kaufman said. "It was easier to get along with people. Things that I had been procrastinating about in my life, I went ahead and did."

Within a year, he stopped drinking. He attributes it all to The Gentle Wind Project. Kaufman has paid for several cards that he shares with whoever needs them. He said he always had been looking for a way to help people, to ease their suffering, and he found the answer in the cards.

There is no noticeable sensation while holding the cards. Kaufman said the effects show themselves by the next day.

After the fires, he and another man, Don Loshenkohl, asked for and were granted a temporary place at the Julian Community Resource Center for fire victims. In three days, 10 people came into the tent, and held between their palms a postcard-sized, laminated instrument for five minutes.

"Most of them, when they started, they were crying," Kaufman said. "But after holding the card for just five minutes, there was a knowing smile on their face. They still knew their house was gone, but they knew they were going to rebuild."

Kaufman said he and Loshenkohl were asked to move outside the resource center to make way for other services. They since have taken their service on the road, and yesterday made stops in Ramona and Scripps Ranch.

[Illustration]

1 PIC; Caption: Nathan Kaufman of Dana Point came to the Julian Community Resource Center recently with cards that proponents say ease stress.; Credit: John Gastaldo / Union-Tribune

Credit: STAFF WRITER

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