

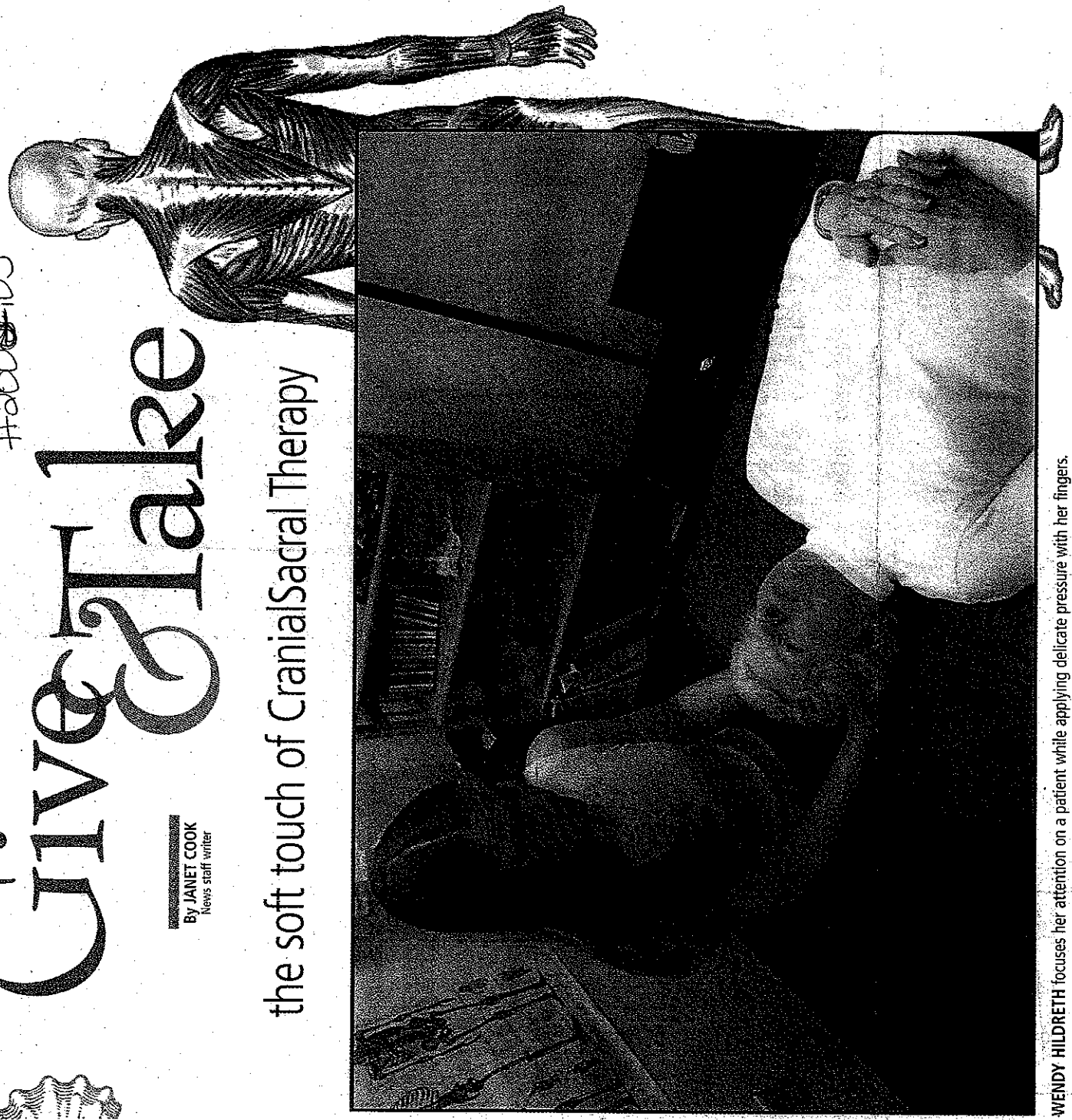


Give & Take

#faceids

By JANET COOK
News staff writer

the soft touch of CranioSacral Therapy



WENDY HILDRETH focuses her attention on a patient while applying delicate pressure with her fingers.

Five grams of pressure is all it takes. The weight of a nickel. Wendy Hildreth lays her fingers gently on her client's skull and holds them there for a few minutes without saying a word. Suddenly, her eyes light up.

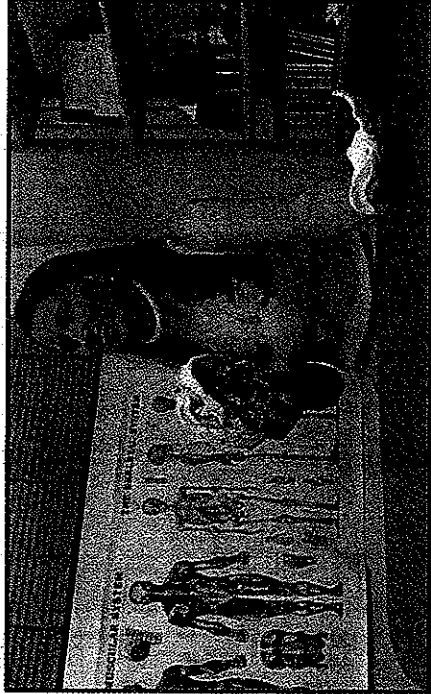
"There you go," she says, as she feels a blocked pathway open up, an imbalance correct itself. She moves her fingers to a spot behind the client's neck and starts again.

Hildreth is practicing CranioSacral therapy (CST), a relatively new alternative therapy that is gaining popularity with athletes, movie stars and the general public. CST addresses imbalances or restrictions in the craniosacral system — the membranes and cerebrospinal fluid that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord. It extends from the bones of the skull, face and mouth, which make up the cranium, down to the sacrum, or tailbone.

By applying light but steady pressure to specific places throughout the system, restrictions will open up and the craniosacral system will be able to function unhindered.

"What I tell people is we're basically dealing with the central nervous system," Hildreth says. Since the brain and spinal cord are contained within the central nervous system, CST has the potential to address a wide variety of body functions and ailments.

Hildreth begins her sessions by establishing a "still



Photographs by
Jim Sembor

News staff photographer

IMBALANCES OR restrictions in the CranioSacral system can inhibit functioning of the central nervous system, explains Hildreth. By releasing the restriction the body can self-correct.

encompasses the brain and spinal cord — a phenomenon none of his colleagues or medical texts could explain. After later taking a course that focused on the bones of the skull and the fact that they actually weren't fused as doctors had previously thought, Upledger theorized that a hydraulic system of sorts was at work inside what he called the craniosacral system.

As a clinical researcher and professor of biomechanics at Michigan State University in the 1970s and '80s, Upledger conducted studies that supported his theory. For the first time, he and other researchers were able to explain the function of the craniosacral system and show how light-touch therapy could be used to evaluate and treat malfunctions involving the brain and spinal cord.

The doctor went on to form the Upledger Institute to educate the public and healthcare practitioners about the benefits of CST. During the last few years, the therapy has gained popularity in treating conditions like

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headaches, neck and back pain, eye problems and motor coordination difficulties.

It also has been used successfully in treating TMJ (temporomandibular joint) syndrome, a painful condition that affects the jaw. Actress Brooke Shields has used CST to treat her own TMJ, which once made eating and even laughing difficult.

Hildreth, a licensed massage therapist, was trained in craniosacral therapy by Upledger himself, and has completed several levels of ongoing training.

"When I started massage school, I knew I needed to come out with craniosacral therapy," Hildreth says. "I had no idea what it was or what it was about." Hildreth has trained in Swedish, deep tissue and myofascial massage, but CST "is definitely my love," she says.

"When I put my hands on the body, I'm telling the body, 'I'm here to do what you need me to do,'" she says. "It's basically just tuning in to the subtleties in the body and listening to it."

Hildreth explains how the light touch — the five grams of pressure — can be so effective.

"The fascia that covers every cell, every muscle, is basically a 3-D web," she says. "If I go in and try to force it to release, I can't do it. But by applying a small load over a longer time, it will give, release and become more fluid."

Hildreth warns clients before their first treatment about the potential side effects.

"The releases that are happening are deep," she says. "So there's always a chance of emotions that are trapped being released, too." She says the 24-48 hours after a treatment "can be interesting." Most CST treatments take about an hour, according to Hildreth. The effects are subtle, so not everyone will recognize them at first.

"It depends on how in tune they are with their body," she says. Most clients who have 3-4 treatments in as many weeks will notice the benefits. "They really start to build," she says.

"People often fall into a very relaxed state," she adds. "If nothing else, it does do that." But through her own training and the feedback she gets from clients, Hildreth knows CST does much more than that.

"During a treatment, there are things going on between a client's body and my hands," she says. "It's amazing what can happen in that time."