

# Massage Therapists Celebrate Life



COURTESY OF ANDY MCCLEEN

Massage therapist Toni Torquato (right) became certified through the Celebrant USA Foundation, and officiated at the recent wedding of Jared and Jennifer Ashlock in San Diego, California.

Toni Torquato has been a licensed massage therapist since 1975, and like most people in the field, she has an entrepreneur's spirit.

In 2006, Torquato, a resident of San Diego, California, discovered the Celebrant USA Foundation, a nonprofit educational institute that trains civil celebrants to officiate at ceremonies marking life's milestones, and found both a way to supplement her income and interact with people

outside her session room.

Today, Torquato is one of 400 certified celebrants in North America. She specializes in weddings as well as ceremonies of loss, transition and healing.

"I'll never give up doing massage—I can't imagine life without it," she said. "That's why celebrancy has truly been the answer to my dream. It's the perfect complement to my skills as a massage therapist."

The celebrant profession started in Australia in the early 1970s. Charlotte Eulette, a former marketing executive, brought the celebrancy movement to America in 2001, when she founded the Celebrant USA Foundation.

"There's a need for rituals to mark important life stages," said Eulette. "People are tired of cookie-cutter ceremonies. People want to have their stories told."

Eulette believes celebrancy complements what massage therapists do very well, and it helps their businesses.

"You form unique bonds with your massage clients, and ritual and ceremony are already very much a part of our profession," explained Torquato. "So, creating personalized rituals and celebrations for our clientele tends to come naturally for us."

She also believes massage therapists are especially good at incorporating aspects of nature and symbolism into ceremonies. "A massage therapist may use hot-stone techniques during a divorce ceremony to symbolize the relief felt when a tremendous weight is lifted," Eulette explained. "At a recent family reunion ceremony, organizers put oil on individuals' feet and massaged them as a way of honoring and blessing family members."

Jonathan Bellingham is a second-generation reflexologist and the recreation manager of his family's seasonal resort in West Virginia. Later this year, he will graduate from the six-month-long online celebrant

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## Low-Back Pain on the Rise

Massage therapists are no strangers to the prevalence of back pain—according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), back pain will affect eight out of 10 people at some point in their lives—as clients present with it often. New research shows the number of people suffering from low-back pain may be increasing.

The incidence of long-term, impairing low-back pain has more than doubled in North Carolina since the early 1990s, with increases seen across all ages, genders and racial and ethnic groups—and researchers believe the increase may be indicative of a similar trend across the U.S.

Reasons for the increase in chronic low-back pain are unclear, although possible causes include increasing rates of obesity, depression and awareness of the condition, researchers said.

"Since the costs of back pain are rising, along with the number of cases, current



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treatments overall do not seem to be very effective," principal investigator Timothy S. Carey, M.D., said. Carey is a professor in the departments of medicine and social medicine at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Traditional medical treatment for back pain includes NSAIDs and cortisone injections, according to the NIH. However, hands-on therapies, including Swedish massage, acupressure and traditional Thai massage, have been found through research to lessen low-back pain.

## Seaweed Warning

Marine products have floated out of the sea and into the massage industry, in the form of body wraps, lotions and scrubs. If you're thinking about adding seaweed to your massage or spa practice, consider using fresh seaweed.



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When two spa workers in Sweden reported such symptoms as fever, shivering, palpitation, joint pain and diarrhea after performing seaweed massages on clients at a spa center, researchers from that country's Department of Occupational and

Environmental Medicine found the workers had been exposed to airborne endotoxin, or toxin secreted by bacteria, at the spa and were suffering from organic dust toxic syndrome. The researchers determined storage time increased the concentration of endotoxin in the seaweed.

"In order to minimize endotoxin exposure during massages, it is important to use fresh seaweed or seaweed kept well cooled for no more than two to three weeks," the researchers noted.

## Online News

Visit [www.massagemag.com](http://www.massagemag.com) and click on "Massage News," "Health News" and "Press Releases" to read the latest news and information in the massage profession. The headlines posted recently at [www.massagemag.com](http://www.massagemag.com) include:



- ▶ Research: Acupressure Bands Reduce Nausea
- ▶ U.S. Health Care Value Trails Other Countries
- ▶ Stress Plays Key Role in Aging
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### Life Experiences Bring Happiness

Purchasing experiences like massage therapy brings the purchaser greater happiness than does buying things, new research indicates.

Experiences result in an increased feeling of well-being because they satisfy higher order needs, specifically the need for social connectedness and vitality, the feeling of being alive.

Read this news item in its entirety at [www.massagemag.com/happypurchase](http://www.massagemag.com/happypurchase).

## Massage in the Media

Selections from the mainstream press on massage and touch therapies.

### Free massage day for state lawmakers

Colorado lawmakers have a tough day ahead of them. They are getting free massages.

The Colorado Coalition of Massage Therapists is sponsoring Massage Therapy Legislative Awareness Day at the state capitol today.

Senators, representatives and their staff members will have access to free chair massages in the old Supreme Court Chambers from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Aside from helping legislators relax, CCMT wants to educate legislators about their profession and the benefits of massage therapy.

—*The Denver Post, Denver, Colorado, March 10*

### Local massage school students handle challenges on way to becoming therapists

The course requirements are enough to discourage those seeking easy credentials, but Ted Kennett's pilot class in massage therapy at A New Beginning School of Massage has nearly filled the small space, and some students have at least a two-hour commute.

The 500-hour class prepares students not only for the state examination for licensed massage therapists but for standing with either of two national certification groups ...

The new massage therapists are health care professionals, and the students are looking for new careers.

—*Killeen Daily Herald, Killeen, Texas, March 8*

### Reiki clinic at MetroHealth offers an alternative to conventional therapy

The door closes. Shoes come off. Rolled-up towels go under the knees, soft pillows under the head. The clatter and conversations of the hospital fade away against a backdrop of delicate, harplike music and the sound of bubbling water.

The room is otherwise still and quiet as reiki practitioners, one at either end of each table, lightly lay their hands on their clients' bodies: the neck, the collarbones, the forehead, the solar plexus, the instep.

A half-hour later, the clients of Hands to Heart Reiki Clinic emerge into the bright fluorescence of the MetroHealth Medical Center hallway feeling refreshed, relaxed and, for some, pain-free.

—*The Plain Dealer, Cleveland, Ohio, March 10*

### Cross-Gender Massage Ban Lifted

Clark County Commissioners have lifted the ban on cross-gender massages. The county regulation mainly targeted lone therapists doing outcalls at homes and hotel rooms. Those who objected to the rule said it lumped them with prostitutes and hurt business.

Yesterday's adjustment has the county joining cities. Las Vegas withdrew its law last year and Henderson and North Las Vegas also allow cross-gender massages. The county will issue business licenses to therapists, but the commission shifted the responsibility of code enforcement to the state.

—*Newsradio 840 KXNT, Las Vegas, Nevada, March 4*



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course, which costs \$1,500 to complete.

"Currently, I offer reflexology teaching sessions to newlyweds," he said. "It helps them begin their life together with a practical way to take care of each other."

Upon graduation, Billingham looks forward to expanding upon this tradition and creating personalized wedding ceremonies for his clients, many of whom have been lifelong guests at the resort.

Torquato has also performed ceremonies for several of her massage clients, including, most recently, a

wedding for a client's daughter.

"You'll do someone's wedding, then they'll want you to organize a baby-naming ceremony for their first child," she said. "Years later, you'll perform a blessing of their new home, and then officiate at a loved one's funeral, and so on. This is why we're now called Life Cycle Celebrants—similar to the family doctor, your clients never want to let you go."

To learn more about the Celebrant USA Foundation, visit [www.celebrantusa.com](http://www.celebrantusa.com).

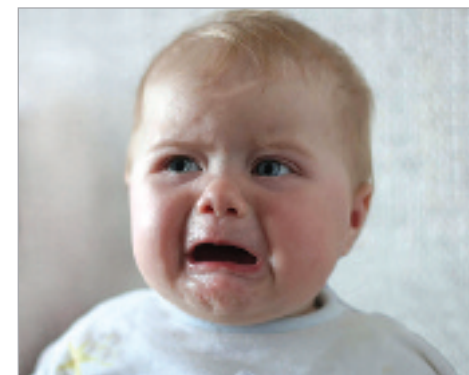
—Allison Hartigan, Editorial Assistant

## Prenatal Stress Affects Infants

There's no question massage therapy reduces stress—and new research shows stress during pregnancy contributes to babies' chances of developing asthma and may contribute to development of allergies.

Researchers at Harvard Medical School found that pregnant women who are stressed predispose their infants to increased sensitivity to allergen exposure. The researchers note only with continued follow-up of these children will they know if these effects will result in increased asthma risk.

"This research adds to a growing body of evidence that links maternal stress, such as that precipitated by financial problems or relationship issues, to changes in children's developing immune systems, even during pregnancy," said Rosalind J. Wright, M.D., M.P.H., assistant professor of medicine at Brigham



and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School. "This further supports the notion that stress can be thought of as a social pollutant that, when 'breathed' into the body, may influence the body's immune response similar to the effects of physical pollutants like allergens, thus adding to their effects."

Pregnancy massage is a growing specialty and is taught at massage schools and in stand-alone workshops nationwide.

