

STARTER

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tournament for volunteers. Called METRO Squash, O'Malley's effort is based on similar programs in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York City that now involve hundreds of players, a handful of whom have gone on to attend some of the best prep schools in the country. METRO Squash will start small, taking in fewer than 20 sixth and seventh graders. "Most of these kids have probably never played squash. They haven't heard of it and they haven't seen it," says O'Malley. "That's what makes it so exciting. It's going to show them another world."

A 2002 graduate of Denison University in Ohio, O'Malley was born in Manhattan and, at 16, went to a Connecticut boarding school. It was there, at Pomfret School, that O'Malley found squash, a game played inside a four-walled court by two players who whack a small rubber ball back and forth above a metal strip 19 inches from the floor.

O'Malley moved to Chicago after college and found his current job, as an assistant squash instructor at the University Club, after entering 2003's Windy City Open. METRO Squash was the dream of several players, including John Flanagan, the University Club's squash pro, but it was O'Malley who took it on full-time, making calls and getting support. The final piece of the project came together last November, when the University of Chicago agreed to donate use of its courts.

Now, METRO Squash hopes to sign up underprivileged students from the Hyde Park area. "The goal isn't to have a world full of squash pros," O'Malley says. "It's for kids to feel part of a positive community and to have them excel academically, emotionally, and physically."

(THE SHORT LIST)

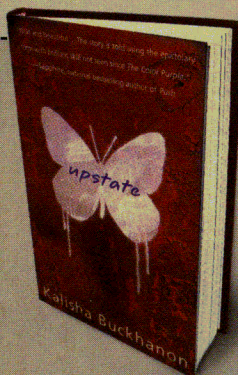
Coffee heats up at area restaurants; a chocolate emporium; healing arts for pets; and other items for January



>> A 'green' taxi service?

>> **GREEN DREAM:** A taxi service using hybrid electric vehicle technology? Bamboo farms on polluted urban lots? For those who fantasize about a greener Chicago, the nonprofit organization **Foresight Design Initiative** kicks off its second annual Chicago Sustainable Design Challenge this month. Gather a team and compete for the most innovative, sustainable solution for urban living. Info: www.foresightdesign.org.

>> **UNCOMMON GROUNDS:** Apparently, the newest requisite for hot Chicago restaurant status is a custom brew by the local coffee maker **Intelligentsia**, blended to set off the subtle flavors of a finely calibrated dessert course. The trend—initiated by the inimitable Charlie Trotter's five years ago—has recently taken off at hot spots such as **Spring, Moto, Avec, and Green Zebra**, whose custom coffee is currently a blend of organic Latin American and Indonesian varieties. "We really like the seasons of coffee, because, like produce, they taste different," says Green Zebra's co-owner Sue Kim-Drohomyrecky. Can a water sommelier be far behind?



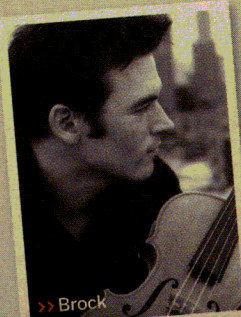
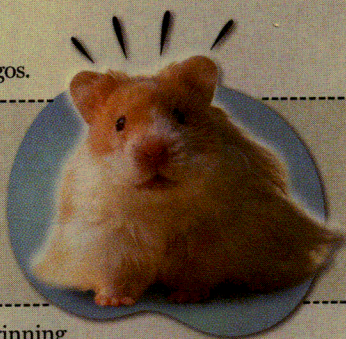
>> **STORY TIME:** Two years ago, **Kalisha Buckhanon** didn't have high hopes for the novel she was writing as a fiction-degree master's thesis in New York City. "I had given up on the whole book publishing thing," says the 27-year-old Kankakee native. "I had two novels rejected before. That was a very crushing thing for me." But her professor, the poet and novelist **Sapphire**, personally walked the unedited manuscript to a literary agent. *Upstate* (St. Martin's; \$19.95), the love story of a teenage girl and her incarcerated boyfriend, appears this month.



>> Buckhanon

>> **FANNIE WHO?** **The Chicago Chocolate Company** (847 W. Randolph St.; 312-738-0804) opens a Randolph Street café midmonth. If hot chocolate (made with the company's own melted milk chocolate) and house specialties like chocolate-covered blueberries don't provide enough sensory overload, look behind the counter, where wall-mounted fountains flow with real chocolate. The Lincoln Park mints are rumored to taste just like Frangos.

>> **HOW ABOUT SHIATSU FOR MY SHIH TZU?** "I have done acupuncture on a hamster," says **Julie Mayer**, veterinarian and a partner in what may well be the city's first dedicated holistic center for animals. **Integrative Pet Care** opens this month at 2520 West Armitage Avenue. Dogs and cats welcome, too. Info: (773) 269-2964.



>> Brock

>> **BROCK ME, AMADEUS:** After beginning his musical career at age five when he says he was "nothing more than a cute oddity," Kentucky native **Zach Brock** played in orchestras, punk bands, and folk groups while finding his way to jazz. Brock, now 30, gigs with **Gary Sinise's** Lt. Dan Band when he's not playing solo. Catch him and his unusual five-string violin January 22nd at the Pritzker Pavilion in Millennium Park (with Grazyna Auguscik and John McLean) in a free indoor concert. Advance copies of his new CD will be on sale at the show; look for it in stores beginning February 15th. Info: www.zachbrock.com.

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