

Teacher Diane Gietzen rehearses with Ray Hintz of De-troit (from left), Bill Laughman of Troy, Craig Schmidt of Livonia. Dave Brichford of Farmington Hills and Schmidt's son Brad.

## Hills family's activity spawns unicycle club

The family that plays together,

The family that plays together, stays together.

That's the theory Farmington Hills residents Tom and Carol Brichford subscribed to while raising their children — David, Mark, Bill and Nancy.

Having four children during a nine-year span, the couple wanted to find a common interest for the kids to "keep the family going in the same direction."

"We were looking for something for everybody to participate in," Carol said.

They thought about Little Leegue, but that could mean going to games four nights a week.

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competition in Europe, their son David came up with a better idea. While he was over there, he saw the Pontiac Unleyclists and was immediately enraptured by it. "He came back so excited about it," Carol said.

The Birchfords — as well as a few kida from the neighborhood in Redford Township — joined the Pontiac club. Soon, so many people were interested in it that the Brichfords didn't have the room to drive everyone to Pontiac. So they started their own club. "It was our family that started the group in 1975. We've remained as supporters as our children went through it. It's an inter-generational activity." Carol said,

On the sidewalks

On the aldewalks
It began as a neighborhood club
in Redford. Neighbors would
drive through and see the kids
practicing on the sidewalks with
their unicycles. Some children
would mount the tall unicycles
from the gutters.
About 10 years later, the Red-

M'We were looking for something for everybody to participate in.'

Carol Brichford

ford Township Unicycle Club, Inc., has moved from the side-walks of Redford to the symnasium at St. Paul's Evangelical Luheran Church on Farmington Road in Livonia.

Beginners ride with one hand on the bleachers and the other on the shoulder of a classmate, or teacher Wendy Grych of Garden City. The more advanced members try out tall unicycles that reach the basketball nets, or shorter ones in the shape of horse. The organization is grateful for the space and the opportunity the church has given them.

"It's very difficult to find a good facility that's available on a Saturday that doesn't cost an erm and a leg." said Carol, who now lives in Farmington Hills with her husband.

Aside from just having fun, the

Aside from just having fun, the

group gets together to practice for appearances at parades in com-munities like Livonia, Redford and Garden City, the Michigan Thanksgiving Day Parade, and halftime at a University of Detroit Mercy baskethall game. The non-profit organization has a file fold-er filled with invitations to per-form.

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There is also an annual competition that members participate in, but most aren't in it for the winnings.

"We go for the fun of it," and Livonia's Craig Schmidt, whose wife Chris and son Brad also ride.
"It's a half, even if you don't place

"It's a ball, even if you don't place in the first few."

Getting started

Each Saturday there is a be-ginners and advance class. The nine-lesson class costs \$20, which

includes the use of a unicycle. Even though it's technically a class, the sessions are casual and meant to be fun.

"We don't consider this a class, per se," Carol said. "We hope that they will like it enough to be a part of the club."

After only a month of practicing, Bryce Grevemeyer of Livonia recently bought his own cycle with the hope to hone his skills in the parking lot on his lunch hour at Ford Motor Company. He learned about the class from coworker Diane Gietzen of Warren.

"I like different things," he said while playing with his new \$120 unicycle. "I also take a blacksmithing class at Greenfield Village, and I teach the principles of electricity at Wayne State University."

At first he was akeptical

of electricity is wayne basic versity."

At first he was skeptical —
"The first time I came I said,
'You're gonna get me to ride this?
Right."

After the first class he was pre-

ty successful. Even without prac-ticing until the next class, he was

able to pick up just about where he left off. The key, he said, is to keep the weight on your feet, keep your eyes forward, and back straight.

"I now believe that anyone can learn," he said.

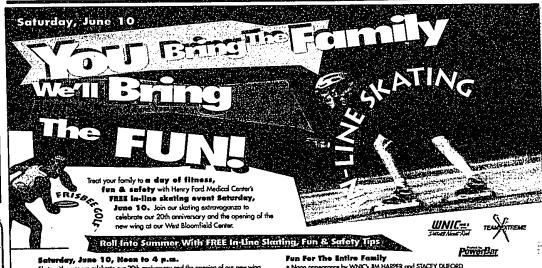
Unicycling has had the same addictive effect on former club members. Sem Abrahams and Teresa Remminger. They took their unicycles to the altar with them — hiterally. The entire wedding party sat on unicycles during the ceremony.

Throughout the 20 years, Tom and Carol Brichford have remained supporters — but not riders. While all four of their children rode, the couple hasn't been able to grasp it.

"You can be support people without getting involved," Carol said.
"We try yearly," Tom added

said.
"We try yearly," Tom added
with a laugh. "Carol can almost
ride."

ride."
For information about the Red-ford Township Unicycle Club, cali (810) 661-0334.



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