



On one wheel: Teacher Diane Gietzen rehearses with Ray Hintz of Detroit (from left), Bill Laughman of Troy, Craig Schmidt of Livonia, Dave Brichford of Farmington Hills and Schmidt's son Brad.

ART EXHIBIT/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Hills family's activity spawns unicycle club

BY CHRISTINA PUOCO

STAFF WRITER

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 League, but that could mean going to games four nights a week.

Returning home from a band

competition in Europe, their son David came up with a better idea. While he was over there, he saw the Pontiac Unicyclists and was immediately enraptured by it.

"He came back so excited about it," Carol said.

The Brichfords — as well as a few kids 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

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-

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

Carol Brichford

ford Township Unicycle Club, Inc., has moved from the sidewalks of Redford to the gymnasium at St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran 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 horses. 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 arm and a leg," said Carol, who now lives in Farmington Hills with her husband.

Aside from just having fun, the

group gets together to practice for appearances at parades in communities like Livonia, Redford and Garden City, the Michigan Thanksgiving Day Parade, and halftime at a University of Detroit Mercy basketball game. The nonprofit organization has a file folder filled with invitations to perform.

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

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

Getting started

Each Saturday there is a beginners 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 Grevenmeyer 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 co-worker 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 skeptical — "The first time I came I said, 'You're gonna get me to ride this? Right?'"

After the first class he was pretty successful. Even without practicing 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 — literally. 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 with a laugh. "Carol can almost ride."

For information about the Redford Township Unicycle Club, call (810) 661-0334.

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