



Happy family: Weary students gather for a class portrait. The students are part of "Baby Think It Over."

Oh baby...

Students learn it's tough to raise kids, especially as a teen

BY RICHARD PEARL
STAFF WRITER
rpearl@ec.homecomm.net

Are you a teenager who believes having a baby is a "fun thing?"

Well, "Baby Think It Over." That's the name of a project in teacher Sharon Drochak's Child Development I class at North Farmington High School which is opening a lot of youthful eyes.

After doing the project, says Drochak, "Most (students) do not want a baby for at least five years."

What pumps up that attitude is what the students must do for 48 consecutive hours: Tote around, in carriers or strollers, a very realistic-looking doll that cries unexpectedly — often at very inopportune times and often quite loudly — at home, at the mall, at the game, at the movies.

Just as real babies will do.

Interviewed during the project, several teens told the Observer that, while they weren't knocking parenthood, they realize babies are cute, cuddly and fun, but they're also very time consuming.

And parenting and its responsibilities are something they realize they just can't handle along with studies, sports and social life — right now or even in college.

As Brooke Anchill, a sopho-

■ Each student also writes about the experience, creating a birth announcement and telling of the changing parental responsibilities during a child's first 18 years, how it feels to be a parent, how life would be different as a real teen parent and what was learned from the simulation.

more, put it: "It shows kids are not ready for it at all. They're too young."

Added classmate Denise Head, a junior: "I thought it would be a lot of fun. But there are so many responsibilities, I'm going to wait until I'm financially settled" before having a family.

Thanks to a variety of parenting "realities" which teacher Drochak secretly programs into each doll, each "baby" acts differently and no student has any idea what theirs will do.

That gets the "pretend" parents sounding like real ones.

"I only got 45 minutes' sleep" all night, said Lindsey Moran, whose "baby" cried every 10 or 20 minutes. "I wanted to throw it (the doll) out the window."

All night long

Rodell Garmo said his doll cried all night long, too.

Holly Gappy's sister yelled at her when the baby woke her. And night-time isn't the only

"right time" for tantrums, the kid-parents learn.

Some dolls wake early each day — which didn't sit well with Candice Stokes: "I'm not a morning person," she said.

Abby Johnson's baby cried when she was taking a test. Some dolls cried between classes, forcing at least one student to apologize for being late. Anchill's doll howled in a parking lot in bad weather: "It was freezing cold, but I had to drop everything and take care of the baby. It was windy and the blankets were flying," she said.

Frankly, said Phil Watha, "I didn't think they were as much trouble as they are."

Just as with real babies, there's a key to quieting them — but here, the "key" is a mechanical one.

A turn of the special key in a slot on the baby's back may quiet it for a while, or for only a couple of minutes, depending on its programming.



STAFF PHOTOS BY BOB BAZZLER

Learning: "I'm so tired," said Denise Head after a night of interrupted sleep, thanks to her "baby."

Garmo's didn't quiet down until he held the key in place for 45 minutes — somewhat akin to a real parent's trying to get an infant back to sleep in the middle of the night.

No shut-offs

Shutting off the doll is not allowed.

But Drochak's class, open to sophomores, juniors and seniors of both sexes, isn't only about carrying a doll around.

Students take pre- and post-tests gauging their attitudes toward babies and parenting.

They also must find out how much feeding and caring cost.

During their 48 hours as moms and dads, they keep a running log which asks when their "baby" cried and when it stopped, what "parent" activity was interrupted, and it also takes comments.

Watha, for example, called the first two crying jags "annoying."

Each student also writes about the experience, creating a birth announcement and telling of the changing parental responsibilities during a child's first 18

years, how it feels to be a parent, how life would be different as a real teen parent and what was learned from the simulation.

Drochak says she's 15 dolls short of the 30 needed to run the project for all students at the same time. What should take only two weeks now takes four due to the shortage.

Interested organizations or individuals wishing to donate to the project should call North Farmington at (248) 489-3535 and ask for Sharon Drochak.

New support groups formed

Arbor Hospice announces the formation of two grief support groups.

New Pathways is a six to eight week support group for adults who are experiencing grief due to the death of a loved one. Group members learn about the grief process while gaining emotional support. The Northville group

will meet Tuesdays 2:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. Jan. 11 to Feb. 29 at First United Methodist Church, 777 W. Eight Mile Road.

For adults who are grieving the death of a parent, a support group will meet Tuesdays 7-8:30 p.m. Jan. 11 through Feb. 29 at the Arbor Hospice residence.

The groups are free. Donations

are welcome.

Arbor Hospice also offers various age and need specific support groups, including groups which address the special needs of grieving children. To register or for more information, call (248) 348-4980.

Limited registrations available

Beginning this week, a limited number of registrations will be taken for a bus trip Saturday, May 20, to the Detroit Institute of Arts' exhibit "Van Gogh, Face to Face." The tour will provide area residents with a chance to visit this major exhibition without the worry of driving or parking.

The bus will leave the Costick Activities Center at 9 a.m. and return at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$23

for adults and \$15 for students 18 and under. Price includes admission to the exhibit, general museum admission and transportation. Tickets may be bought at the Farmington Hills special services office, 31555 11 Mile. The Van Gogh tour will begin at 10:30. Additional time will be allowed for lunch at the museum or to view other exhibits.

The DIA's "Van Gogh, Face to Face" is the first showing of the

first exhibition of portraits by Vincent Van Gogh. Organized by the Detroit Institute of Arts, the show celebrates the artists' commitment to and love of portraiture and features 70 paintings and drawings brought together from an array of public and private international collections.

For more information, call the cultural arts division at 473-1856.

Redford sculptor to speak at Artist Club Jan. 12

Redford artist Sergio DeGuisti, a renowned sculptor, will be guest speaker of the Farmington Artist Club at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 12, at the Farmington Hills branch library on 12 Mile Road.

The club meets the second

Wednesday of the month at the library and the meeting is open to anyone interested in the arts.

DeGuisti has taught art history at Wayne State University and sculpture at the Center for Creative Studies and the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center.

His work has been exhibited in such places as the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Smithsonian, the British Museum in London and the Council of Cultural Affairs in Sweden.

County health division offers free health care to kids

children from birth to school age. Families who do not have an HMO or Medicaid may be eligi-

ble. Clinics are held throughout Oakland County.

**We've moved,
but we're still in the
neighborhood.**



On the corner of South Adams & Webster

Please Join Us For A Spirited Grand Opening Sale
Help us toast the millennium in our brand new location: 908 S. Adams, Birmingham

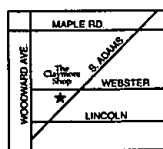
Opening December 30, 1999 Offering plenty of free parking

Champagne Celebration

December 30* 10 a.m. — 6 p.m.

December 31* 10 a.m. — 4p.m.

Visit us during our Fabulous Winter Clearance thru January



**The
Claymore
Shop**

908 South Adams
Birmingham, MI
248-642-7755

Store Hours
Weekdays 10-6
Thursdays 10-9
Closed Saturday January 1