

Parenting advocacy is new issue for Junior League

By Ellen E. Mason
special writer

THE UNITED STATES is the only major industrialized country in the world without a national policy covering maternity or paternal leave of absence from jobs, a recent report by the Association of Junior Leagues concludes.

So the Junior League, once synonymous with non-controversial volunteerism, has moved from a forum for discussion of the issue to advocate for expanded parental leave policies in the U.S. League officers discussed this advocacy recently in a Detroit gathering for League leaders representing a membership in the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

The stance comes at a time when more than half of the League's 160,000 members work outside the home and virtually all are child-bearing age.

Sally Orr, director of public policy for the Association of Junior Leagues, said the League became involved in the

maternity-parental leave question because it is an emerging national issue. "The time is right, and we have enough background," Orr said.

THE LEAGUE's report, presented at its recent annual meeting in Detroit, said that, "Employees should have the right to paid job-protected leave with continuation of existing health benefits for temporary, non-occupational disabilities including those that are pregnancy and childbirth related and employees should further have the right to

elect a job-protected leave of absence for parenting."

The latter policy would encompass men, mothers who wish to extend their maternity leaves and parents of newly adopted children, Orr said.

"The issue of parental leave has become a 'hot' topic," the report states. And Orr concedes that more liberal parental-leave policies would have national financial, social and cultural ramifications.

The irony of this policy position for Junior Leaguers, the organization's of-

ficers acknowledge, is that most of its members come from business-oriented families who manage or own many of the major companies and corporations in the U.S. This also gives League members unique access to top-level employers and executives.

The effect of the report will soon be felt in Birmingham and Bloomfield Hills where League members have begun looking for ways to implement the report's suggestions.

Dottie Pfaff, president of the Birmingham Junior League, said the report has far-reaching implications for the local chapter because many Junior League members here are in decision-making positions or are related to people in decision-making positions in major local, national and international companies.

"Families and youth have always been a priority area for the Birmingham Junior League," Pfaff said.

SHE SAID her group will begin widely distributing the report, will work with groups in Washington for passage of legislation, and will act as a resource to groups and companies wanting information on maternity and parental leave policies and positions and the experiences of various corporations throughout the U.S.

At present the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 states that employers who provide temporary disability

insurance to employees must cover pregnancy and childbirth as any other disability. The act only applies to employers with more than 14 employees but does not require that an employer provide disability insurance, Pfaff said. About 45 percent of working women in the U.S. today are covered by the act.

Additionally, the League points out, no policy exists to encourage fathers to take a leave of absence. Implicit in that statement is that fathers should be encouraged — by national policy — to take such leaves.

"If women get special treatment, we have discrimination all over again," Orr said. "Being a parent is a special thing."

Orr believes that it is important that such leaves be paid and to protect the worker's right to return to the job.

"Otherwise it becomes kind of a 'Yuppie bill,'" Ms. Orr said, "because low-income or low-seniority employees can't afford to take advantage of it."

When people first hear about paternity leave the tendency is to focus on the negatives of the idea, Orr said.

"But many companies, like City Bank of New York, are having good experiences with the policy and doing creative things. They put money into training employees and can offer this as part of a benefits package and they see it's to their advantage," she said. "It isn't the norm, but it's coming."

Many benefits for many people

Gardening has many benefits for many people. As I mentioned briefly last week, I recently had a leisurely tour of Camp Oakland near Oxford.

The director, David E. Ballenberger, a dedicated young man, has his finger on the pulse of young teen-agers who need help to meet the world outside.

These young people are assisted in many ways by compassionate instructors in education and a wholesome outdoor program on rolling farm land with lakes and acres of evergreens planted many years ago for future production.

There is a summer camp which children of all ages can attend and the mothers have a dormitory close by for a change of responsibilities for them-



down to earth

Alice Burlingame

ones, as well. This fine setting with buildings, is a tribute to the Later family who gave it, and the staff which is dedicated to helping young people. The fruitful lessons and the appreciation of the beauty of nature are a plus for the young people.

You might think that this report about Camp Oakland is coming in my column at a time when I should be

writing exclusively about you planting in your garden.

BUT YEARS of intensive study of horticulture in a profession of rehabilitation has taught me that being close to nature has a way of leveling off the daily trials that you and I experience in a sophisticated society.

As my patients through the years have gone down the road of gardening, they acknowledge that digging in the soil has a way of ironing out troubles.

This cycle of May is an excellent time to change color schemes in various parts of your flower garden and to try new plants.

For instance, I saw a beautiful border of gray-green leaves on a low lavender hedge. The gray-green leaves

made the color of annuals and perennials in the flower bed more noticeable. If you have a small area which seems to need a color accent, you could plant a geranium to direct the eye. With "the style" now to grow annuals for color accent, you can do this with pansies, asters, begonias, the list is endless, for a grouping of flowers for a striking color display.

THIS IS an ideal time to visit the extensive gardens of Cranbrook for new ideas. The auxiliary provides guided tours with leaders trained to answer questions. Groups can make an appointment and ask for a guide or you can go yourself and wander through the grounds and study the evergreens, trees, shrubs and annuals which provide a sea of color.

Very few locations in the United States have such a treat for garden lovers and those who appreciate beauty. There is a minimum charge which is used to buy fresh plants of all kinds.

Remember that an appreciation of gardens is a growing experience and one of the best teachers is observing areas of beauty as expressed by others.

Student council leaders to meet in conference

J.B. Hildebrand of Farmington Hills is one of 1,300 student council leaders and faculty advisers who will attend the 49th National Conference of the National Association of Student Councils (NASC) June 23-27, in Bethel Park, Pa.

With the theme of "Leadership - The Keystone of Unity," the conference program will present workshop sessions on leadership skills, effective student government projects, and student activity program development. Delegates representing every state, the District of Columbia, U.S. territories and neighboring countries will discuss social, educational and political issues, and exchange ideas.

Hildebrand, one of 39 Michigan residents attending the conference, has been active in student activities for 23 years and serves as NASC state executive secretary. He has been chairman of the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals' Student Leadership Committee for 10 years.

NASC is sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASPP), a 34,000-member professional educational association based in Reston, Va.

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