

Suburban Life

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Many happy returns

Yanks catch on to Aussie boomeranging

By Joanne Sobczak
special writer

CAN YOU REMEMBER WHERE YOU went on your first date? Twelve-year-old Noah Kleiman can. He took his girl "friend" boomeranging in a field behind West Hills Middle School in West Bloomfield.

Kleiman is active with Boomerang ETC (Easy Throws and Catches), the only official boomerang group in the Detroit area. He started throwing a boomerang at age six — "Half my life," boasts the seventh grader.

It was a family affair then — Noah and his parents, Shanna and Robert. Noah's first throws weren't quite the best and seem to head toward his mother. Not thrilled about tagging along, she eventually stopped going. Now, it's just the guys.

Kleiman, a systems architect at the Unisys Corp. in Plymouth, began tossing with a co-worker in 1986 while living in San Diego. He brought what became his favorite sport back with him to Michigan and demonstrated throws and catches during his lunch hour.

That was how Boomerang ETC got its start. Now there are some 30 participants, ages 6-60, from throughout the metropolitan area, who gather to throw at four to eight informal events and twice a year for the Turkey Toss at Thanksgiving and Solstice Throw, celebrating the longest day of the year.

"There also is one tournament," said Norm Kern, a systems engineering manager at Unisys and co-founder of the "common interest group."

"BUT we also sometimes throw away our friends," Kleiman jokes, referring to a farewell party given for a buddy that became an informal throwing event.

The group gathers at several locations in the Wayne and Oakland counties to practice their throws. One spot is West Hills in West Bloomfield; another is at Bryant School in Livonia.

Boomerangs are fun, according to the two men who are eager to expand participation.

"You don't even have to have seen a boomerang; you just have to be interested," said Kleiman, a West Bloomfield resident. "We're perfectly happy to loan people boomerangs and teach them how to throw."

A boomerang is a flattened, angled throwing stick possessing certain aerodynamic properties that give it its characteristic flight. It usually has two, three or four arms. Each has a cross section of an airplane wing — rounded and thick at the front, thin and angular at the back. When thrown vertically with a rotational spin, the boomerang travels a near circular path back to the thrower.

The term itself is derived from native Australian languages and is applied to a specific stick designed to return to the vicinity of the thrower. The boomerang was



photos by JIM JACOBFIELD/staff photographer

Norm Kern, a systems engineering manager at Unisys in Plymouth and co-founder of Boomerang ETC, has his own brand of body language when he tosses the boomerang.

traditionally an adult toy not to be confused with the other non-returning hunting types. Those clubs acted as digging and skinning tools. The return boomerang, however, was strictly for fun.

"THEY WOULD play this game where the guy who throw it would jump back. The idea was to hit the people who were standing behind him," Kleiman said. "We don't do that."

Boomeranging came to the United States around the

turn of the century. An American businessman named Samuel Bristol commercially produced the curved stick and included rules and a catching net.

There were only regional activities until the 1970s when Richard Harrison, "The Boomerang Man of Monroe, La.," began his mail order business and newsletter while Ben Hulse began annual workshops at the Smithsonian Institute where he was employed.

They built enough enthusiasm to attract and train the first boomerangers to accept a challenge from Australia in 1980. That gave the sport national recognition and the United States Boomerang Association was created.

While you may not think of boomeranging as a sport, there really is more to it than the basic tossing and catching.

For advanced boomerangers, there's tuning and tapping — twisting and bending the boomerang to affect its flight pattern. Using a tape on a boomerang can make it fly longer or shorter distances or slow down its spin. Holes also are drilled in the stick to kill the spin.

ONCE THE initial skills are learned, there are trick throws and catches to master to keep boomerangers from getting bored, according to Kern, who designs and sells boomerangs for both right- and left-handed throwers.

Juggling is throwing two boomerangs and keeping one in the air at all times until one drops. The record is 89 juggles.

Doubling consists of throwing two boomerangs together one-handed. After the first throw, the stick must be caught two-handed. The second time it must be caught one-handed. And the third catch must occur with one in the right hand and one in the left hand.

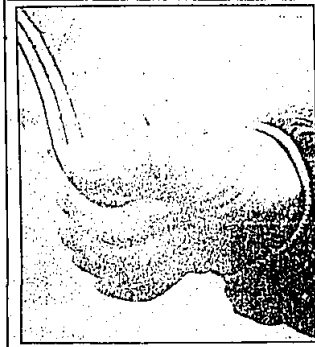
In competition, the doubling throws and catches are repeated and the number of catches are added up for the score.

In competitive consecutive catching, all members of the group throw simultaneously. The first throw is caught in two hands, the second in the left hand, the third in the right hand, the fourth behind the back, the fifth under the leg and the sixth between the feet.

WHILE THE sport tends to be dominated by men, there are a few women throwers like Callie Laurent. The 31-year-old Ortonville resident began tossing in 1982 and has placed in national tournaments. In 1985-86, she was top female thrower in the country and 22nd in male/female competitions nationally.

"They don't rate men and women differently in the USA," said Laurent, who no longer travels to tournaments because of her children. "It's great fun and you can get out and do it all by yourself."

For more information about Boomerang ETC, call Norm Kern at 645-9308 after 7 p.m. or Robert Kleiman at 683-2212.



Boomerang takes plenty of practice

TOSSING A BOOMERANG takes more than a grassy field free of obstructions.

To practice tossing, hold the boomerang with the flat side against your index finger. With your thumb on the curved topside, choose a grip tight enough so that it can't twist in your hand, but is loose enough so that it can spin when thrown.

Envision the boomerang as the hour hand of a clock and point toward one o'clock. That is the tilt at which you throw the boomerang. Don't bend the wrist sideways and keep the boomerang in line with the forearm.

Never throw it like a FRISBEE or throw it sideways. Always make sure to watch the boomerang while in flight and be ready to move quickly if it comes back AT you rather than TO you.

PRIOR TO each throw, check to see which direction the wind is coming from by dropping some grass and watching how it falls.

"Conceptually, throwing a boomerang is like bouncing a ball off a wall," says Robert Kleiman. "The wall is the wind."

Consider the wind as being 12 o'clock. Locate a distant object between the 2 and 3 o'clock positions to use as an aiming point. Pivot the boomerang back in your hand and throw it, using an overhand style. Don't throw hard — skill is more important than power.

Stance is important, too. Your left side should face the distant object and both feet should point slightly to the right. With the left foot ahead of the right foot, begin with the weight on the right foot and finish with the weight on the left foot.

If the throw and the direction of the throw are correct, the boomerang will come back. It may, however, continue on or not complete a circle.

"If it comes back to much, put less umph in your throw so there is less spin and it's not going as fast," said Kleiman.

IF IT needs to come back more, just the opposite is true. You need to put more power in the throw, tossing it lower or more horizontally. But, Kleiman cautioned, be careful not to toss it too horizontally. That could break the boomerang and, if not, chances are it will come back at the thrower as fast as it did when released.

Now that you've learned how to throw the boomerang, the next adventure is catching it. Kleiman says catching skills are not taught until the boomerang is returning correctly.

"You catch a boomerang that has slowed down and has started to hover," he said. "If it comes back real fast, you just get out of the way."

To catch a boomerang, you need to hold out your hands, palms clasped together with fingers extended and spread apart to catch it without bruising the fingertips.

Don Kenely of Farmington Hills has been throwing for about nine years but seriously for only a year.



Kevin Richardson, 6½, of Livonia still chases down his returning boomerang even though he's been throwing for six months.



Women's conference tackles healthy concerns

By Larry O'Connor
staff writer

Though the title suggests otherwise, the women's conference Saturday at Oakland Community College is being presented for more than just the health of it.

Pressing issues concerning the physical well-being of women are only a part of "A Call to Wholeness: A Women's Health Agenda for the '90s," an all-day conference jointly sponsored by OCC's Womencenter and Schoolcraft College Women's Resource Center and Health Center.

A myriad of topics are to be covered in 20 workshops, including such non-medical themes as "Legal Implications of Divorce," "Feminization of Poverty," and "How to Manage the Health Insurance Dilemma in the 20th Century."

"We think women's health involves all different aspects — not just physical," said Mindy Fedbaum, who is assistant director of OCC's Womencenter. "Your socioeconomic status is a big factor in your health."

Women make up a disproportionate

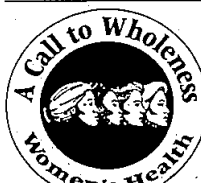
number of the new poor; they're less likely to have health insurance. Those only speak to fiscal issues.

Coupled with alarming physical trends — such as women having a one out of nine chance of developing breast cancer and women accounting for the highest number of cases of heterosexual transmission of AIDS — these are dire times for women.

As a result, awareness and information are at a premium. The goal of the conference is to provide that from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. with informative workshops and with a speaker at 7 p.m.

THE KEYNOTE speaker is author Norma Swenson, president and co-director of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective. She also co-authored "Our Bodies, Ourselves," "The New Our Bodies, Ourselves," and "Growing Older." Swenson teaches at the Harvard University School of Public Health.

Overall, though, the conference is an earmark event for the OCC Womencenter, which is marking 20 years of service.



"We think women's health involves all different aspects — not just physical."

— Mindy Fedbaum
assistant director,
OCC's Womencenter

Last year alone, the OCC Womencenter served 7,000 women with support groups, peer counseling, educational programs as well as referral assistance on medical, legal, financial, career, personal counseling and child care matters.

The staff at the center has been working since last summer in preparation for Saturday's conference. More than 100 people have already signed up with 200 expected with walk-up registrations.

The conference will also mark one of the first times the women centers at Schoolcraft and OCC have worked jointly on a project.

Schoolcraft College Women's Resource Center and Health Center had presented seminar on issues such as rape prevention and sexual assault.

They wanted to do another health seminar and heard about the OCC conference.

"I told Kay Raby (of Schoolcraft Health Center), 'It looks like they already have something going,'" said Nancy Swanborg, director of Schoolcraft College Women's Resource Center. "In many ways our popula-

tions overlap since we're only a few miles from each other. We figured why try and reinvent the wheel?"

The theme of women's health was partly inspired by one of the center's "founding mothers" Sadie Davis, who died at age 46 of cervical cancer in 1986.

"Women are often caretakers. They ignore their own bodies," Fedbaum said. "We thought this was an important conference so women can focus on themselves and leave the care issues behind."

Identity is covered in workshops on self-esteem, on being gay and body image pertaining to diet and growing problem particularly among women — eating disorders.

THE CONFERENCE delves into the spiritual being as well. "Dance Ecstasy: Using the Creative Process to Uncover Our Hidden Self" and "Heath Yoga" are workshops designed to tap into the subconscious realm.

Physical health issues concerning women, of course, highlight the event with workshops on sexually transmitted diseases, substance abuse, sexual abuse, menopause and

prenatal genetic testing.

"It's just gaining self-knowledge and taking care of yourself," Fedbaum said. "You need that information to make good educational decisions about yourself."

"That's what the center is all about: Helping women to make educational decisions. It's about empowerment."

Added Fedbaum: "Hopefully at the end of the day these women will feel they gained some knowledge and will feel good about themselves."

The Women's Health Conference, "A Call to Wholeness: A Women's Health Agenda for the '90s," will take place 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, March 14, at OCC Orchard Ridge Campus, 2705 Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills. Walk-up registration is \$10 and starts at 9 a.m. in Tired Hall, J Building. Keynote speaker Norma Swenson speaks at 7 p.m. Admission is \$5, which includes entertainment by Phoenix Rising and the Northville High Girls Ensemble. For information, call 471-7692.