

Group for moms of triplets has fun times three

BY STEPHANIE ANGELYN CAROLA
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They rolled through the parking lot in triplicate, with Santa hats bobbing all the way.

A first Christmas, a group of about 17 families of triplets—known collectively as 3-4-All—got dressed in their holiday finery and strolled into Livonia's Wonderland Mall with Mom and Dad for a special visit with Santa Claus and some quality play time.

The special event, organized by Cathy Young, marketing director at the mall, gave the children a special moment with Santa—who came in early and posed for pictures, starting at 9 a.m. This was the first event of its kind at the mall.

"This was a perfect venue," said Young, smiling. "I know the group tries to get together as much as they can." She considered the day a success and may plan another day for triples in the future.

It all started at Oakwood Hospital. Four mothers-to-be found themselves in one special situation. They were all about to give birth to triplets.

More than two years later, the mommies connected with about 12 other sets of parents with triplets to exchange advice and give support. The group is building strong friendships all along the way.

Once a month the moms get together for dinner and conversation, and around the holidays,

they plan events with the children.

On Friday, giggles and chatter echoed through the corridors of the mall, which has been transformed into a Winter Wonderland for the holiday shopping season.

With a hearty "Ho, ho, ho, Merry Christmas," Santa posed for a group shot with the kiddies and led the tribe to an early lunch in the mall.

Triple the joy

Although some people might think parenting three babies at once is a difficult task, all the parents agreed it's really triple the joy.

Just ask Lesley Merlino, a founding parent of Aftershock Times Three, one of the groups that makes up 3-4-All. The Farmington Hills resident was one of the original four moms and now writes a newsletter that keeps the group in touch with events, activities and advice. She insists that "life is great."

"It's a lot of work, but it's worth it," said Merlino. "You get three times the love, three times the hugs, three times the kisses. It's really all worth it."

But imagine trying to feed three hungry babies at once, or put three sobbing infants to sleep at the same time. These are the daily activities facing moms and dads with triplets.

Good thing Carole Kody is around to support them. The Canton resident and mother of 2-year-old triplets started Aft-

ershock and saw many of the other mothers through their pregnancies.

She warned the mothers-to-be to stay off their feet, and—once the little ones were born—gave them strategies to get the babies to sleep at night.

But Kody admits the group is worthwhile for her, too.

"It's the best," she said. "It's the one thing I look forward to every month. It's so great to know there's such support."

They can relate

Like the other parents, Kody said the most important aspect of belonging to the group is the support, advice and friendship she receives from others in her situation.

"It makes such a difference because they can relate," she said. "They understand. It helps keep me sane."

Joann Alcantara of Redford agreed, admitting she was "scared to death" when she found out she was not having one baby, but three.

"No one can really relate unless you have triplets," she said, adding that not even parents of twins can truly understand what parenting triplets is like. "The program is great because they've all been through it."

So now when her little ones want to be held at the same time, and she finds she doesn't have enough hands to pick them all up, she sits on the floor and lets them all be close to her at the same time. That's something

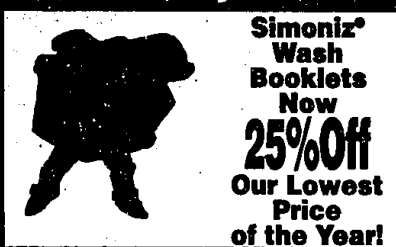


Family portrait: The Merlino family of Farmington Hills pose with Santa Claus during a recent outing at Wonderland Mall in Livonia. Mom Lesley Merlino writes a newsletter for the support group for mothers of triplets.

Susan Gannon of Livonia has had 23 months to get used to. As mother to Natalie, Madeline and Gregory, she's made a lot of friends.

For information about joining 3-4-All or raising triplets, call (248) 426-0646.

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