

CHAT ROOM



Kathie O'Donohue

You know you have children when ...

You know you have kids when ... you absent-mindedly order six "Sesame Street" as opposed to sesame seed bagels. When you use the word "potty" in adult company to excuse your absence.

When you think your house is pretty well picked up till you awaken at 3 a.m. and wander around in the dark tripping on small metal cars and Lego pieces.

When "happy hour" takes on a brand new meaning as that minuscule sliver of time when your child is miraculously mesmerized by the tube, and you actually begin to recall that coffee does taste good hot. It is further confirmed that happy hour has taken a life-changing turn when you realize the drink of choice is caffeinated, not alcoholic.

As you notice small handprints on all your walls and vehicles, gouges out of the paint, rips out of the wall paper, and not a single piece of intact molding in the house.

As you approach the checkout in the supermarket with several items you did not put in your cart not to mention a few things you never would have considered purchasing in your thinner days.

You are acutely aware you have off.

Please see CHAT ROOM, B2

'Tis the season to practice fire safety

A former Farmington Hills firefighter created a fire safety video for homeowners.

By MARY RODRIGUE
STAFF WRITER
mrodrigue@cc.homecomm.net

'Tis almost the season for indoor Christmas lights strung on live trees, a fire safety hazard along with space heaters, faulty furnaces and other plagues of cold weather living.

Enter John Zylka, a former Farmington Hills firefighter and producer of videotapes with home safety themes. Zylka's SafetyTech company has just released "Fire Smart -- The Ultimate Lesson," a 53-minute tape on how to avoid potentially fire-hazardous situations in the home.

Thirteen months in the making, the video features a controlled fire of a Farmington Hills house and tips for prevention. A controlled fire is one that is started and extinguished by the fire department as a training exercise for personnel. Zylka filmed the fire in cooperation with the Farmington Hills Fire Department and YMCA.

The house used for the drill stood on Farmington Road at 12 Mile on property owned by the YMCA. Zylka spent months painting, carpeting and furnishing the house to make it look like a real family home.

Fire Smart tells a story

Zylka's "Fire Smart" creates a story in which he takes the wife/mother character through a television screen - a gimmick used in the current hit movie "Pleasantville" - and shows her firsthand the devastating effects of a house fire. It focuses on things insurance can't cover - such as her wedding album, now a charred ruined mess

beyond restoration. To examine just how much damage can be done by smoke even in rooms not subject to flames, she removes a large stuffed animal from her daughter's bedspread to reveal a perfect outline against the sooty covers. All because the door was left open. Although actual flames are contained to the living room in this six-minute

fire, the nearby kitchen is heavily damaged, from melted mini blinds to extensive smoke damage.

Bedrooms with closed doors during the fire suffered no smoke damage. The video is full of little fire smart tips such as the importance of keeping doors closed.

"I feel it's especially important this time of year as we all begin to prepare for winter," said Zylka, who lives in Plymouth Township and operates SafetyTech out of his home office. "I've had positive feedback from the professionals who have previewed this tape."

Chief plugs video

Farmington Hills Fire Chief Richard Marinucci says "It's very well-done and very emotional. It will contribute to saving lives and reducing injuries and loss due to fire."

The second part of the video was filmed at the University of Michigan Trauma Burn Unit and features an interview with the unit's director, Dr. Warren Garner. Burn prevention and care are discussed. A family who almost lost their young son in a house fire is interviewed and viewers see how it has changed their lives forever. Survival Flight which operates at U-M also helped with the re-enactment of a Lumn injury. Communicore of Plymouth provided instrumental help with the technical end of the production.

"While filming did have its difficult moments, it will be worth it if it can help prevent even one fire from victimizing an innocent family," Zylka said. "This was truly a labor of love for me."

Zylka was a member of the Farmington Hills Fire Department for seven years and firefighter of the year in 1994. He taught community classes on fire and home safety, first aid, CPR and safe baby-sitting. He currently serves on the advisory panel of Home Safe & Sound, a year-round guide to protecting family and home. He is currently working on his fifth video.

Please see FIRE, B2



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRANSLER

Videos: John Zylka has produced a new video on fire safety.

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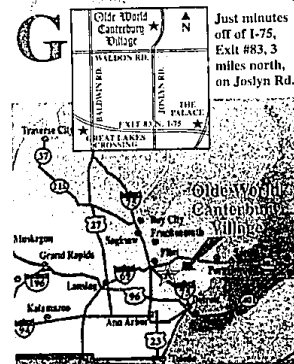
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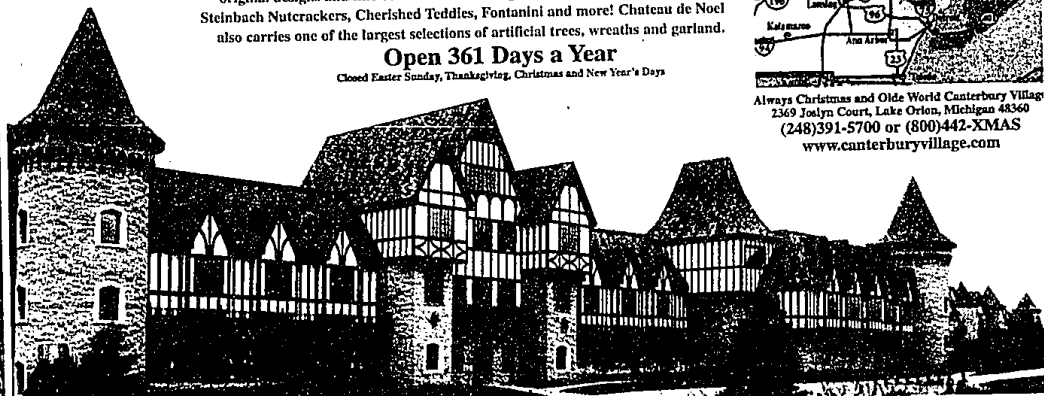
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