

CHAT ROOM



KATHIE O'DONOHUE

Let's hear it for the dads - fabric of family life

One of the saddest conditions in our present-day society is the absence of fathers. There are cowardly fathers who leave, those gutless wonders who never even admit paternity, and a few heart-breaking cases where fathers have died. Nowadays there are celebrity mothers who opt to have children without benefit of marriage then raise them without fathers, thinking they can fill both roles.

Today, segments of our culture view a father as dispensable, someone they can pretend to not need, discredit, find fault with, try to substitute for. Yet a father is as necessary to the family as rain to the earth, and society is suffering without them.

I often consider what my life would have been like without a father, and I have concluded that, had he been absent, there would be a gaping, mangled hole in the fabric of my life forever.

Dads hang tough
Probably more than a man even realizes, it is a sign of truly arriving when he earns the right to be called "dad." Dads are the guys who hang tough, those who are with their families through everything. They are frequently behind-the-scenes breadwinners who provide the general supporting structure of the family.

Dads are the men who show up, in spite of the scrapes and gashes of separation, divorce, re-marriage, step-parenthood or an endless host of assorted present-day interrelational calamities, who give and want to be part of the lives that helped bring into this world. They're the amazing people who aren't too proud to kneel beside a small child to survey and appreciate the grubby bug in his dirty little hand or to use those same knees in the humble act of prayer.

Dads are men who know what they're about and don't have to be told by the world. Guys who coach ball teams, bait fishing hooks, who stand on the sidelines and cheer on their kid even when she scores a goal for the opposing team or runs in the wrong direction. Dad is the one who opens the peanut butter lid that 18 other people have "loosened."

Balancing act
Dads are also the people with the firm hands who learn to navigate delicate tightropes, balancing guidance and direction with the occasional shoulder grip necessary to make eye contact with a "needy" child. They're guys who aren't afraid to be fathers; to stand as an example; to meet the challenges presented by hormones of even adolescents, get in their faces and let them know DAD IS BOSS and there are still lines one doesn't cross in his house - men self-assured enough to let their children not be their friends and sometimes even hate them, but who mete out punishment as deserved.

Today's dads who are in the game are taking an active role with their families more than ever. They're everywhere, from delivery rooms to school committees and teacher conferences, at the supermarket checkout, and even running the kitchen appliances. Though they may have the high-tech gadgets and toys, dads don't need pagers and portable phones, laptops, six-figure incomes, or anything other than willing hands to realize their importance. They recognize what counts is their meaning in the lives of very small ones, not corporate giants.

Still, many dads are like I remember mine: the quiet hero providing for his family - doing whatever it takes; the man in every house who held his child's undying adoration, the same guy you never wanted to cross. The man with the rough hands who cut the grass, threw a football, understood how to use power tools, but was human and manly enough to shed a tear at his daughter's wedding.

Dads are the characters who so often seem to be in the background but are actually always in the forefront of a child's mind and heart.

I really do feel sorry for those fathers who drop out and the children

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Karate kids

Martial arts is a family affair at this local school.

Parents and kids train side-by-side at this karate school in Farmington's Uptown Plaza.

BY KATHIE O'DONOHUE
SPECIAL WRITER

It's pretty much what you'd expect to see and hear in any martial arts "dojo" - traditional white uniforms with different color belts, sounds of physical exertion, Korean commands spoken abruptly, lots of encouragement, and replies of "Yes, sir!" and "Yes, ma'am!" generously peppering the session.

The enjoyment is obvious, while other benefits may be less so.

Today at Farmington Uptown Plaza's Professional Karate School of America, Michael Authier and his children - Tia, 9, Shauna, 7 and Michael, 5 - train while mom, Cyd, sits on the side.

"My son started four months ago and he looked like he was having so much fun I decided I wanted to join and my daughters wanted to join, too," Michael Sr. said.

Cyd Authier describes some of the advantages.

"They learn respect, self-discipline and they have fun doing it. My husband joined originally for the kids, but now he likes it."

The Authiers have found an advantageous way to spend quality time as they all work out and learn martial arts together.

Stands apart

Second-degree black belt Duane Pitcher and his wife, Valerie, have operated the school for a year and a half. With so many choices available, what makes this martial arts school different from the others?

"We're family oriented," Pitcher said. "We've made it affordable for families. We encourage them to train together. We bring parents on the floor to participate with us, and when they do this together, it (provides) a bonding that you can't find anywhere else."

"It's about the cost of a McDonald's meal a week for a family to train together," he said.

The school favors a pay-as-you-go philosophy.

"We like people to commit to six months or a year, or if they choose not to continue we ask for a 30-day notice."

There's also additional testing and equipment fees, though the school is a martial arts supplier, which helps contain some of the cost.

Pitcher believes self-defense helps kids because "the things they learn here they take outside of our school and use at home and school to better their grades, their cooperative efforts. It helps them appreciate their parents for bringing them to class and getting them into a positive activity."

Redford resident Sherry Schwedt believes it definitely works. Her son, Matthew, 9, an orange belt, is now leading a group of students. Her daughter, Nichole, 12, trains as well. Matthew first took karate last fall through a Professional Karate School mini-session offered at his school.

"It's a really nice program," Sherry Schwedt said. "Matthew's an active boy who's got to go, go, go, and he's wanted to do karate since he was 3, but we waited."

Teaches self-discipline

Schwedt said karate helped her son with his temper.

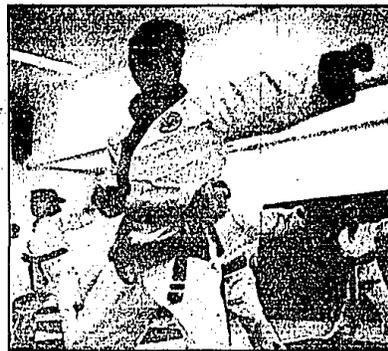
"Karate has totally calmed him down and given him more direction. You're not here to learn to fight, but to learn how to get out of a fight. Parents appreciate that. Also, Matt has asthma and this is the one thing that hasn't caused problems for him."

Schwedt said her daughter was very shy and now she participates in everything.

"Her teachers even noticed and commented: she is the first kid to raise her hand in class. Her self-esteem has gone through the roof. She's a totally different child. My husband signed up to spend time with the kids, and he's really become a way of life with them. He has lost 30 pounds since January. There's been lots of benefits."

Another aspect the mom likes is "the instructor has children my children's ages. He has a total understanding of how these kids are thinking and what they need, and he makes it fun for them."

"The instructor, even the discipline, takes a positive approach. If someone's



STAFF PHOTOS BY BILL DEWELER

Moves: At left, Duane Pitcher leads class. Below, Christie Pitcher and Brittany Mattheus at practice at Professional Karate School of America in Farmington's Uptown Plaza. Many families take classes together.



out of line, a punishment might be 10 push-ups. Schwedt admits her family shopped around thoroughly before picking this karate school and have been pleased.

Kon Johnson, a child psychiatric social worker at Davis Counseling in Farmington Hills, believes "martial arts can be a real help. For some, there

are advantages in terms of self-control; the discipline and strategy can help. (Yet) with some kids who are diffusely aggressive, they can get into imitating what they see in the media's exposure to kickboxing, karate, etc."

Johnson says he has seen cases where martial arts training for chil-

Please See KARATE, B2

Group buoys women business owners

BY MARY RODRIQUE
STAFF WRITER
mrodrique@oe.homecomm.net

"It's still a man's world. It's nice to know from a professional standpoint that there are women out there who support each other," says Marcia Fronter, owner of Frontier & Associates Insurance Co. of Farmington Hills.

She's speaking at the Professional Womens Roundtable launched five years ago by Nurten Ural, owner of

Ural Interiors, Inc. of Farmington Hills, and Paula Boegner, owner of Boegner Design & Build and a former manager of Huntington Bank in Farmington Hills.

Most of the dozen women members are business owners. Many are winners of the prestigious Athena Award. Their days are a whirlwind of business and family commitments and they belong to a myriad of business and professional organizations. But they like the round-

table for its laid back atmosphere.

A safe haven

The group meets once a month in Ural's home to share dinner and unwind. There's an opportunity for business networking but also a haven to share war stories from the business and home fronts. And be assured everything said stays confidential.

"A new client of mine said it would be a good group for me," recalls Fron-

ter, who joined the group last October. "We learn more about each other's businesses, we share a meal. There's an element of business talk but fun things, too."

Frontier started her company, affiliated with Nationwide Insurance, four years ago. Last year, her husband came to work for her. The couple has two sons attending community college.

"I haven't gone to every monthly meeting. My practice is 60 hours a week plus sometimes after hours. But the size of the group makes it possible to really get to know the women, unlike a chamber function where we might just say hello."

One of the rules is that each member be from a different type of business. So Frontier is the only insurance saleswoman, for example. She has added several members as clients.

Frontier is on the Ambassador Committee for the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce and sings with an octet which performs in local nursing homes and churches.

Ural, whose business specializes in interior design and is headquartered on Orchard Lake Road, started the club to help women "juggle the stresses of home and career life. Some people said we'd never last but we're still going strong."

In fact, Ural says there's a waiting list of potential members and a second club might be formed.

"I think if we went bigger than 12 people, the group would lose its effective-

Please See ROUNDTABLE, B2

Roundtable:
Seated, Paula Boegner, Linda Jolicouer, Marcia Fronter and Kathy Hietala; back row, Sharon Hain Gaber, Nurten Ural, Norma McAdams, Sherry Pianko, Terry Deichert and Laura Rembisz. Sherri Gelman is not pictured.



Miss Farmington hopefuls visit city council

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER
tsmith@oe.homecomm.net

The Farmington City Council last week received a preview of the Wednesday, June 21 Miss Farmington/Oakland City Pageant at the Civic Theatre.

Seven of 10 pageant contestants stepped up to the podium to introduce themselves and their platforms.

Current Miss Farmington/Oakland

County Leslie Reinbold also spoke, raving about her experience the past 12 months.

"I just want to let you know it's been an absolute pleasure working with you all year," said Reinbold to council. "The year has gone by so fast. Farmington has become like a second home to me."

This year's pageant (7 p.m. June 21) is the kickoff event for the 2000 Farmington Area Family Festival, which is scheduled from Thursday, June 22

through Saturday, June 24. The pageant also is being held at the Civic for the first time; for many years it took place at Vladimir's Banquet Hall on Grand River.

Introduced were the following:
Victoria Anderson, 20, a North Farmington High School graduate who is entering her junior year at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Anderson intends to help promote awareness of asthma to help spur new

solutions to the respiratory ailment - which she suffers from herself.

Bristol Arnold, 18, a recent graduate of Wallied Lake Central High School. Arnold's platform centers around preventing drunken driving.

Angela Cori, 18, who recently graduated from Mercy High School in Farmington Hills. Cori's platform is "Countless Histories - One Future."

Madonna Emonds, 19, a sopho-

Please See MISS FARMINGTON, B3