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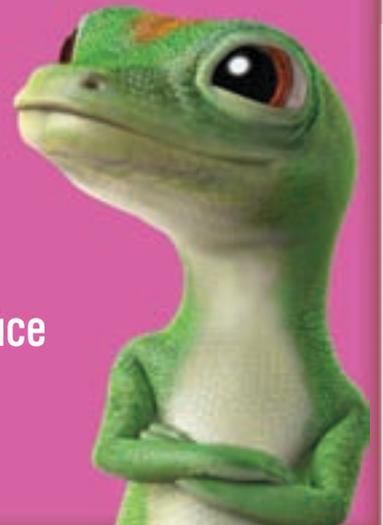
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Letter from the publisher

One-Year Later/Newtown

It's one year since the terrible tragedy at Newtown and although many of us thought it would provoke changes in our gun laws, it hasn't. The lobbies are seemingly too powerful, and the sight and memories of children and teachers dying are not in the forefront anymore. They are yesterday's news as we march onward with more recent headlines.

Astonishingly we heard the sentiment of a segment of the public and media that encouraged more guns and armed guards in schools as the answer to future violence. The emphasis on identifying those



potentially disturbed enough to resort to massacre isn't talked about much anymore.

Proudly, our outgoing mayor, Mr. Bloomberg, has put his money where his heart and intelligence are and has provided funds for candidates

across the nation, who favor restrictions on the manufacture and sale of assault weapons. He is funding the "other side", the mothers and fathers of Newtown who have in spite of their grief been pleading for reason on the issues of guns and mental health.

I think about those children, teachers, and the parents and fami-

lies who in a few short minutes lost their lives and their loved ones. I can't imagine it happening to a child of mine. I can't imagine I would ever get over my grief; that I could ever go on again with a smile on my face. But people do. We do.

I don't want to forget these children, or the children in Columbine, or in Oklahoma City. I want us all to remember the unnecessary loss and insanity of these shoot-ups and bombings, and I want us to be on alert for the next time. I want us to *do* something.

I want people everywhere to give peace a chance by believing that we can accomplish this. I want us as a society to believe that it's not the norm for people to periodically go berserk and kill other children

and that we must find the mentality and the determination to stop it.

A strange way to begin my column for the New Year? No, because I want this year to be free of such tragedies and all the years to come. I want this year and all the years to bring guaranteed safety to our children everywhere. Yes, you can say I'm a dreamer, but as John Lennon said, "I'm not the only one."

Happy New Year.

Susan Weiss-Voskidis,
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How to make the most of a doctor's visit

A pediatrician addresses many parents' common concerns

BY KATHY SENA

As parents, we've all had questions when taking a child to the doctor: what information should I bring? How do I get copies of past lab reports and X-rays? How do I keep track of my child's immunizations and medications?

We shared these common concerns with Dr. Jean Hanley, a board-certified physician with more than 20 years of experience in pediatrics and allergy, asthma, and immunological diseases. Hanley is also the founder of PLANning Health, a non-profit patient-advocacy service that helps people with health problems receive better care in all aspects of their health, such as understanding their symptoms, diagnosis, procedures, treatments, and insurance coverage.

Kathy Sena: When my child is sick, and I'm worried, it's easy to forget to bring the right things to the doctor's appointment. What should I remember to bring to make it an effective appointment?

Dr. Jean Hanley: It's helpful to create a medical history for your child and to update it as needed. This can be done on paper, on a computer document or spreadsheet, or with one of the convenient health-tracking apps for your computer or mobile device. List immunizations, past diagnoses, treatments, lab results, medications taken daily (asthma inhalers, recent antibiotics, etc.), and intermittently (acetaminophen, ibuprofen, etc.).

I highly suggest trying one of the free or inexpensive medical-tracking apps that can be easily downloaded to your phone or computer:

- My Medical Records (online and mobile app: www.freehealthtrack.com)
- My Medical (online and mobile app: www.mymedicalapp.com)
- Hermes (mobile app)
- MyHealth (mobile app)

These databases allow you to record medications, procedures, tests, allergies, surgical procedures, diagnoses, injuries, photos, insurance info, and more. Having easily available medical information can lead to a more-efficient and productive doctor's visit.

If you don't have all of this information available, it's important to bring at least the actual medications that your child has been taking recently.

Write down your child's symptoms: cold, cough, ear pain, etc. When did the symptoms start? If there was an injury, what happened? Where does it hurt? How have the symptoms progressed? Are they getting better, worse, or staying the same? (If the illness or injury happens suddenly, and you have to rush to a doctor's appointment, try to write down this info while in the waiting room.)

KS: How do I get copies of medical records, tests, X-rays, etc. from other doctors to bring for my appointment, if necessary?

JH: Requesting records from hospitals and clinics takes time, and each office has its own procedure for requesting records. Most facilities require that you fill out a special form. Healthcare providers are required by law to share information regarding your child. The requested items can be sent to you by mail, fax, or e-mail, or you can pick them up in person. Procedures such as lab tests, X-rays, etc. will need to be requested from the doctor who ordered them. Most labs do not provide information directly to the patient or guardian.

The smartest step a parent can take is to obtain the records at the time of the visit, so that they have as much information as possible at their fingertips and they don't have to go through the hassle of requesting records.

KS: Should I bring another adult along for the visit if I'm bringing a

young child? How does this help?

JH: I always advocate bringing another adult with you to doctor visits, whether it's for your child or for yourself. A spouse, friend, or other family member often serves as an objective observer and provides what I call the "witness effect." Although I'm a doctor, I get sick, too! As a patient, I often went to appointments by myself. When my spouse would occasionally accompany me, I noticed that more time and attention was being given to me. Although I felt that my care was very good, the "phenomenon" of even more information being disseminated when I had another adult with me was an eye opener. An objective friend or family member also may be able to ask questions that you may forget, or to ask for important details or clarification.

KS: What about communicating with my child's doctor by e-mail? How do I suggest this? Is it common these days?

JH: There has been a very slow, but steady, increase in electronic communications between doctors and patients, but only about five percent of doctors do this currently. One issue is privacy. The Federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act must be complied with in all e-mails, ensuring that any health information sent is secure and truly private. For this reason, many doctors won't use e-mail.

Doctors who do use e-mail will ask their patients to sign forms agreeing to communicate electronically regarding health issues. Some only exchange lab or procedure results or non-urgent follow-up information. For other medical situations, you'll likely be asked to call the doctor's office. I believe that e-mail communications and texting will continue to increase over time. The only way to know if your doctor is actively e-mailing patients is to ask. Many medical groups, such as the American



it's easy to become overwhelmed and confused with the details of a diagnosis, treatment, or the potential side effects of a medication. Medical misinformation from the internet often leads to perplexing concerns about medical conditions. For this reason, it's imperative that parents ask for clarification and confirmation of online information and that the doctor's office provides written instructions regarding your child's diagnosis and treatment.

KS:What should I do if I

differences or the risk and benefits for each. There are numerous areas that may need to be addressed, and this is when a patient advocate can step in and help the parents sort out the issues.

For example, a child for whom I advocated had a rare, potentially fatal rheumatological (arthritis) condition for which the doctor prescribed a lengthy treatment with medications that had serious possible side effects. After researching the illness, doctor, and medications,

The smartest step a parent can take is to obtain medical records at the time of the visit, so that they don't have to go through the hassle of requesting records later on.

don't understand my child's diagnosis or the treatment plan the doctor is suggesting?

JH:Contact the doctor's office right away to get answers to your remaining questions. Often, a nurse will help you understand what you need to know. If you find that you frequently are not given sufficient information about your child's health, then you may want to either prepare and research conditions prior to the doctor's visit or consider finding a new doctor who may be more thorough during the visit.

KS:What should I do if my child is diagnosed with a major illness, and I need help navigating the healthcare system, researching treatment options, dealing with insurance issues, etc?

JH:There are many resources for most childhood illnesses that should be available from your doctor's office. But depending on the severity of the illness, the family may need help in navigating the healthcare system.

Sometimes a diagnosis cannot be established. Other times, a diagnosis has been given, but insurance issues delay proper evaluation or treatment. Several treatment options may be presented and the parents may not understand the

I was able to provide reassurance to the family that they were receiving excellent care and that the benefits of the life-saving medication well outweighed the risks.

Patient advocacy is a growing field, and some hospitals and clinics are beginning to hire their own advocates. If your doctor or hospital cannot suggest a patient advocate, you can find one independently. The Professional Patient Advocate Institute (www.patientadvocatetraining.com) and Health Care Navigators (www.health-care-navigators.com) are two of several organizations that can help you find an advocate. Advocates can be doctors, nurses, other medical personnel, or social workers.

My organization, PLANning Health (www.planninghealth.org), is a non-profit and does not charge for services, although donations, from those who can afford it, are what keep us afloat. Most for-profit patient advocates charge \$50 to \$200 per hour for services.

Patient-advocacy services may include making home visits, developing medication and treatment plans, providing questions for doctor's visits, accompanying patients to the doctor's visit, researching illnesses on reliable medical websites, dealing with insurance issues, and more. The needs of the family may be satisfied by one phone call or they may require more-extensive services.

Kathy Sena has been writing about children's health since her son was born in 1995. She is now learning more than she ever wanted to know about the college-search process. Visit her website at www.kathysena.com.

Academy of Pediatrics, are trying to establish guidelines as to how to incorporate and better serve patients through electronic communications.

It's important to remember that no amount of electronic communication can take the place of a thorough history, a physical exam, and an in-person conversation with your child's doctor.

KS:I'd like to do online research on my child's condition or symptoms before the doctor's visit. How do I share this information with the doctor?

JH:In our information age, many parents want to have a shared decision-making relationship with their child's doctor. The parents may have already researched the illness and may have a fairly good idea of what diagnosis or treatment plans are available. Some parents feel more comfortable accepting the doctor's information as-is. Either way is acceptable, as long as you're comfortable with the relationship: one-way vs. shared.

A note of caution: With medical information at our internet fingertips,

New year's eats

Easy ways to avoid weight gain and be healthier in 2014

BY JAMIE LOBER

As we kick off the New Year, people tend to become more interested in seeking nutrition advice, whether they are looking to lose a few pounds or just become healthier.

"The holidays are a time that is challenging for a lot of people with their weight and eating healthy," said Despina Hyde, nutritionist at New York University Langone Medical Center. This means that January is the month in which we have to recover and get back on track. But, while it may sound impossible, it is not as hard as you think.

"One of the major issues is just being mindful and tuning in to whether we are really enjoying the food or eating because it is front of us," said Hyde.

Remember, you do not have to eat everything. "I like to tell my patients to pick their indulgences, and when there are a lot of things out there, chose the ones you really love," said Hyde. This can also help with portion control. "You may really love mashed potatoes but stuffing may not be your favorite, so you can do without that," said Hyde.

Food preferences are very individualized. "Everyone has different cultural celebrations and things they do with their families, so some strategies can be applied widely and others are more specific," said Hyde. If each person just takes away one or two tips and follows through with them throughout the year, they will be healthier.

You may have had a few drinks to ring in the New Year, but be sure to tone it down as the month progresses. Doctors stress that alcohol is only okay in moderation.

"One challenge I see a lot of is alcohol, because it adds more calories than people believe it does, and it lowers inhibitions, which leads people to eat more than they were planning on," said Hyde. Mix things up. "If you have a drink, the next drink could be something like club soda or water to space it out throughout the night."

Aim for sugar-free mixers. "Stay away from fattening, high-calorie or high-sugar punches and know that wine is also a good option," said Hyde. It is lower in calories than other drinks, and it is essential that you stay hydrated.

Eating a balanced meal is important. If you are planning to dine at a friend's house or go to a social gathering, plan your actions in advance.

"You should have protein to stabilize the blood sugar before you attend a party, and that way, you will not feel as hungry," said Hyde. If you are going to a get-together, bring a healthy dish to share. "If you are hosting, send stuff home with guests," said Hyde.

Do not let the food take away from the other positive aspects of your event. "Focus on socialization and making time about the family and not the food," said Hyde.

Find alternatives. "Look for ways to swap calories, so if there is a typical dish that is usually traditionally

high in fat or calories, find a way to modify it," said Hyde. This is almost always doable. "One thing I love is swapping mashed cauliflower for mashed potatoes or using apple sauce or a prune puree in baked goods as opposed to butters and oils," said Hyde.

Greek yogurt is another popular choice. There are ways to reduce fat just by cooking slightly differently. Instead of frying, try baking, broiling, microwaving or boiling. To reduce calories, eat fruits canned in their own juice instead of syrup. To enhance flavor, use vanilla, nutmeg, or cinnamon.

You can be proactive at a restaurant by asking questions, such as whether the cook is willing to leave gravy or cream sauces off of dishes, accommodate special requests like swapping fries for a salad, and use less oil. The National Institutes of Health suggests choosing foods that are steamed in their own juice, broiled, baked, roasted, poached, or lightly sautéed. Choose a lower-calorie salad dressing, and do not eat the skin on chicken or turkey. Consider the fact that portion sizes have gotten larger over the years, and remember it is okay to bring leftovers home for the next day. You may also want to share your entrée with someone, eat off smaller plates, or skip buffets.

Gaining a few pounds or more is preventable. "It is about behavior change, eating fewer calories than your body needs, skipping that extra cookie, increasing vegetable intake, and filling up on lean protein," said Hyde.

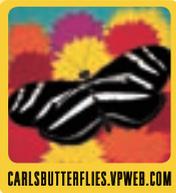
Increasing physical activity also helps. Get in the habit of staying on a regular eating schedule. It is always nice to eat as a family most days of the week. Always eat before you get hungry and never skip breakfast. Chew slowly and enjoy what you are eating instead of rushing through it.

When you have a game plan in advance, it is easier to follow your own rules and feel good about your diet.

Jamie Lober, author of "Pink Power" (www.getpinkpower.com), is dedicated to providing information on women's and pediatric health topics. She can be reached at jamie@getpinkpower.com.

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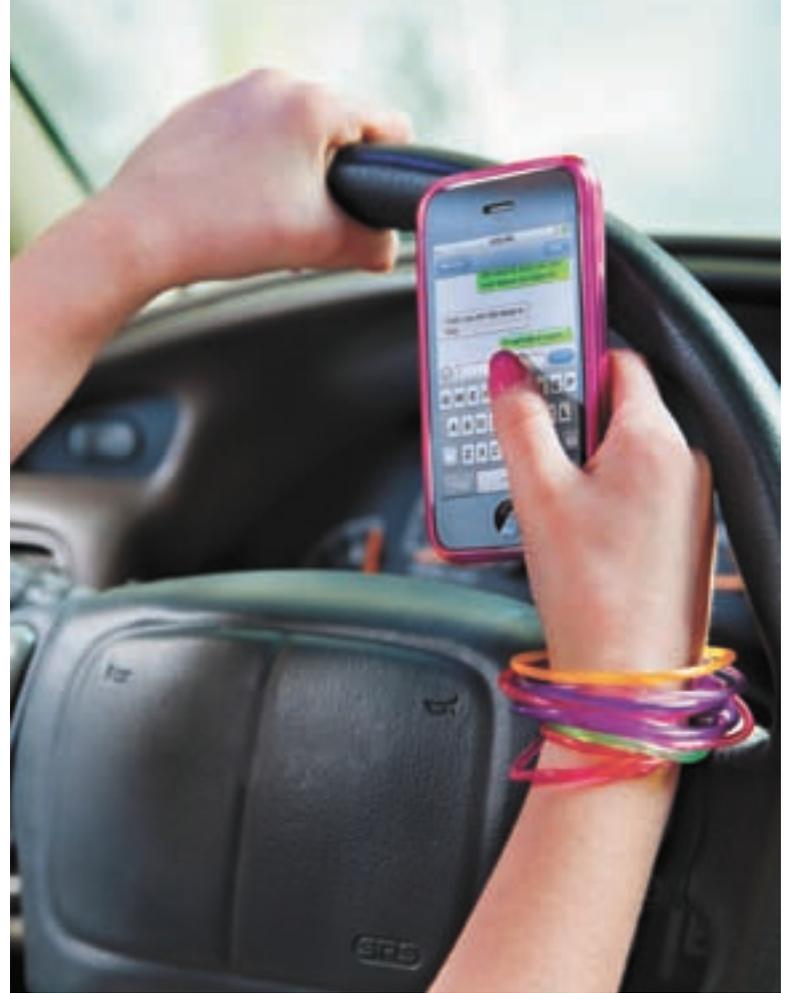
BY KERRIE MCLOUGHLIN

We hear all the time about teens getting into a car crash because they were texting while driving. We've seen the heartbreaking public service announcements about a teen's last text before running down a pedestrian. Teens get such a bad rap for texting and driving, yet I see so many adults who are driving while trying to dial a phone number, texting, putting on makeup, holding their pet — often with small children in the backseat. What are we teaching our children and teens about distracted driving?

So many of us are multitaskers by nature. Everyone is busy, and some of us are in our car more often than we would like to be. It's tempting to want to pop off a quick text message to let someone know you are running late. It's easy to make a fast phone call to the doctor's office from the car to ask a question you might forget about by the time you get home. And we have to check in with work, don't we?

According to Distraction.gov, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's website, "Distracted driving is any activity that could divert a person's attention away from the primary task of driving. All distractions endanger driver, passenger, and bystander safety. These types of distractions include: texting; using a cellphone or smartphone; eating and drinking; talking to passengers; grooming; reading, including maps; using a navigation system; watching a video; adjusting a radio, CD player, or MP3 player."

So how do you keep your teenager from texting or talking on her cellphone while driving? For starters, you have to be a good example. A teenager recently told me her mother drives with her knee while applying lipstick



and talking on the phone at the same time. It's possible that observing a bad example will make this teenager go the opposite way; maybe not.

One mom I know says, "Oh I'm horrible — I text, but with my voice app more now. I always put on makeup in the car. It's a horrible habit I have, I'm a terrible example; in fact, I have talked to [my kids] a lot about what I do [that] they shouldn't."

Another option is to get a cool app to help you out. Privus Mobile® is a Dallas-based application developer that has come up with a caller ID app that says out loud who a text is from. This way, a person can decide to ignore the text or to pull off to the side of the road to check the text or answer it. With this app, drivers won't have to look at their phone to see who is sending a text and then try to read it and respond while driving. To learn more about this app to help end texting while driving, go to <http://privus-mobile.com/eyesontheroad>.

Realize that being late to your destination is better than not arriving at all, because you had to do last-minute things in your car, instead of at home, and you caused an accident. Thinking, "I can just call or text my friend back while I'm driving the kids to dance class" could be deadly and is something you can make a note

about and do later.

Keep track of when your child is driving places and check it against the phone bill to see if there were any calls or texts during that time. If it turns out your child is practicing distracted driving, decide on the consequences, such as taking away driving or other privileges, etc.

More ideas include:

- Keep snacks and bottles of water in the car for the kids to get into if they need them instead of you digging around for them and passing them back.

- Pull over to soothe your baby instead of reaching back and trying to get a pacifier or bottle in his mouth.

- Rather than adjusting the radio or CD player endlessly, leave it where it is or turn it off entirely.

- Stow your phone somewhere in the car where you can't reach it and won't be tempted to answer it. Turning it off is also a good idea, so you won't hear the ringing or ding of it and get stressed out thinking it might be something urgent. Even using a headset is not necessarily safer, as your mind is still focused on the phone call and not on the road.

Kerrie McLoughlin is the mom of five and author of "Fun, Frugal and Green Christmas." Come and see her at TheKerrieShow.com.

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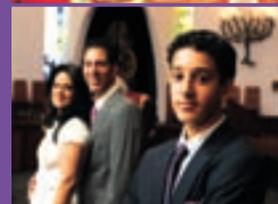
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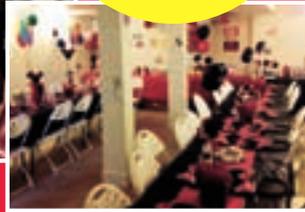
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DIVORCE & SEPARATION

LEE CHABIN, ESQ.

A low-cost divorce

Community mediation can offer an alternative

“Chris” and “Eliza” agreed that it was time to get divorced. Chris, who initially hadn’t wanted the marriage to end and who had been saddened by the breakup, was now angry at his wife. He thought — especially since they had children — that Eliza owed it to them to try and save the family.

But Eliza had made her decision: the marriage was over. Her major concern was avoiding a bitter end to it that would hurt their children and poison the future parenting relationship.

Money was a major concern. Chris had lost his job and was now working at another that paid substantially less. Living apart would cost more and add to the strain.

This couple is fictional, but many real ones find answers at Community Dispute Resolution Centers located throughout the state. Community Mediation Services in Queens is

one of them. [Disclosure: I recently began working there as a staff member.] These centers provide numerous services for families and communities, including when it comes to separation and divorce.

Yvonne Rinchere, case coordinator and court liaison, runs the Queens center’s divorce mediation program.

The program, Rinchere says, “allows couples who have decided that they are separating to have a discussion and possibly come to agreements. Parties can reach their own decisions.”

Mediation “considerably lowers the cost of divorce,” she continues, noting that divorce clients at the Queens center (and perhaps at other centers elsewhere) pay according to a sliding scale.

The program is open to anyone, pending approval after an initial screening process to determine the case’s suitability for mediation. Most cases are completed within six hours, consisting of three two-hour sessions.

The mediators, who may or may not also be lawyers, have been certified at Community Mediation Services, and have taken advanced training in divorce there. Most have been mediating with the center for more than two years, handling a variety of cases that come in. The quality of service they provide is high.

Peggy Russell, Director of Mediation Services, oversees all of the Queens center’s mediation programs, including its newest one, created to assist veterans and their families deal with interpersonal issues that frequently exist after a soldier has returned home, following a tour abroad.

In her mind, a benefit of all of the mediation programs is that the cases are less contentious than those battled in the courts.

“The process is more fo-

cused on maintaining relationships within families. Mediation is self-determinative; you get to decide what is best for you, your children and your family, and not the court.”

“Litigation seems to me about taking sides, whereas mediation offers the opportunity to work together rather than against each other, and to speak for yourself rather than have an attorney speak for you,” Russell adds.

Andrea Hirshman, Esq., is a mediator who has handled Community Mediation Services cases. She says that participants are “happy to have a place to be heard, to have time and space to say what is important to them, and have the other one hear it,” without that resulting in a battle.

“People can get the emotional relief that they’re looking for, as well as lasting agreements because they come to their decisions on their own,” she says. “People expect the legal system to right the emotional injustices. That does not happen, and so they become and remain bitter, and mediation can avoid that.”

One woman who went through mediation said it was an unexpected positive experience.

“I didn’t think [mediation] would work for us, we were both so hurt and angry,” but the mediator helped us talk about the future, what we each needed, and to keep thinking about what is best for our son,” she shares. “It worked for us.”

Community Dispute Resolution Centers can be an invaluable resource. Find one at www.nycourts.gov/ip/adr/ProgramList.shtml.

Contact Community Mediation Services’ Yvonne Rinchere at (718) 523-6868 or yrinchere@mediatenyc.org.

New York City and Long Island-based divorce mediator and collaborative divorce lawyer Lee Chabin helps clients end their relationships respectfully and without going to court. Contact him at lee_chabin@lc-mediate.com, (718) 229-6149, or go to <http://lc-mediate.com/>. Follow him on Facebook at www.facebook.com/lchabin.

Disclaimer: All material in this column is for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice.





HEALTHY LIVING

DANIELLE SULLIVAN



Photo by Aaron Greenhood

The health effects of long commutes

How long is your daily commute to work? The average commute lasts 25.4 minutes, but many New Yorkers easily beat those numbers day in and day out. Kathy Carrera, a mom of four from Sheepshead Bay, says that her commute includes a bus and a train, and takes about 90 minutes each way — if there is no train traffic, late buses, or stalled subway signals.

Technically, this would categorize Carrera as an extreme commuter.

“It definitely gets harder in the winter and as the temperatures dip, my stress level goes up!” she says.

With so much time spent in buses and cars, not to mention ferries and railroads, commuting can often seem like the ultimate waste in a busy life. Even worse, it can become a factor leading to overall life dissatisfaction and even bad health. A Swedish study finds that couples in which one partner commutes for longer than 45 minutes are 40 percent likelier to divorce. In addition, longer commutes are believed to cause obesity, neck pain, loneliness, stress, and insom-

nia. Today, one in every six workers spends 45 minutes commuting each way, and 3.5 million Americans spend more than 90 minutes and are categorized as “extreme commuters.”

Moreover, the resulting health ramifications combined with the mental stressors can be damaging. People with long transit times suffer from disproportionate pain, stress, obesity, and dissatisfaction.

Economist John Kain wrote back in 1965, that it is “crucial that, in making longer journeys to work, households incur larger costs in both time and money. Since time is a scarce commodity, workers should demand some compensation for the time they spend in commuting.”

But would getting compensated for our long commutes help? Two economists at the University of Zurich — Bruno Frey and Alois Stutzer — actually went about quantifying it, in a now-famous 2004 paper entitled “Stress That Doesn’t Pay: The Commuting Paradox.” They found that for an extra hour of commuting time, you would need to be compensated

with a massive 40 percent increase in salary to make it worthwhile. Imagine that for people who commute three hours a day or more. Not likely happening any time soon.

Carrera finds there are times when she can actually find her commute relaxing.

“When I get a seat on the bus and train, and have time to read a book and zone out, I enjoy it. I guess a lot of it is how you look at it,” she says.

Carrera is right, perspective is everything, and while you may not want to take a job that is very far away, when you already have one, you are faced with two choices: either look for another job closer to home or learn how to accept a longer commute, because allowing yourself to be stressed on a daily basis is never a good health option.

Danielle Sullivan, a mom of three, has worked as a writer and editor in the parenting world for more than 10 years. Sullivan also writes about pets and parenting for Disney’s Babble.com. Find Sullivan on her blogs, Just Write Mom and Some Puppy To Love.

Health insurance STRATEGIES

Choosing a family-friendly health plan in the age of Obamacare

BY SANDRA GORDON

If you don't get health insurance through your employer, your spouse's employer, or a parent if you're 26 or younger, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, a.k.a. Obamacare, should make getting affordable health care easier. Here's what you need to know.

"Health care reform is awesome," says Katherine Woodfield, an insurance expert and author of "Don't Buy THAT Health Insurance: Become an Educated Health Care Consumer." "It's the first federal oversight of a completely non-federally regulated industry in 100 years." Think of it as consumer protection.

Even though coverage under the plan starts on Jan. 1, 2014, open enrollment, the period when the federal government allows consumers to choose a health plan or to select a different health plan if they already have health insurance, runs through March 31, 2014, for the first year of the Affordable Care Act. The sooner you get your application in, the better, because the longer you delay, the longer you'll have to wait for your health insurance coverage to start.

If you enroll between the 1st and the 15th of the month, your coverage will start the following month. But if you enroll between the 16th through the 30th of the month, your coverage won't start until the month after that. For example, if you wait until the last day of open enrollment (March 31), your coverage won't begin until May 1, 2014. Delaying can cost you. Going three consecutive months in 2014 without health coverage, even during open enrollment, will assess a \$95 penalty on your income taxes. The penalty for going without health insurance for 90 days or more increases over time. By 2016, it will be up to \$695.

While [healthcare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov) is getting the kinks out for online applications, you can choose the "Apply by Phone" op-

tion at www.healthcare.gov. A navigator will send you a paper application, which you can complete and mail back. You can reach a navigator by calling 1-800-318-2596 or by visiting www.healthcare.gov and clicking "Chat Now" in the bottom right-hand corner.

What is a health insurance agent?

One caveat: "A navigator isn't allowed to give you an opinion," Woodfield says. If you want that kind of help, consider working with a health insurance agent, a licensed and certified professional who has gone through federal training to understand the act and the financial implications of the various choices, including off-exchange plans, which are designed for consumers who aren't eligible for federal subsidies.

A health insurance agent can help you choose the best plan for your family and offer plan recommendations.

"Having someone assist you who is licensed, educated, and experienced releases you from the burden of having to do it yourself," says Mike Stahl, a senior vice president at Healthmarkets.com, a national health insurance agency that employs more than 3,000 agents throughout the U.S. and offers more than 80 insurance carriers from which consumers can choose. An agent can help you compare your best options both on and off the exchange, help you determine if you're eligible for a tax credit, and even complete the health insurance application process for you.

Agents receive a commission from insurance companies for their services, which are free to consumers.

"There's no discount by skipping an agent, so you might as well take advantage of the expertise," Woodfield says. To find a licensed health insurance broker in your state, visit www.healthmarkets.com or www.healthcare.gov, and click on "Contact Us" at the bottom of home page,

then click on "Find Local Help."

There's a lot to know about the Affordable Care Act, so be sure to visit www.healthcare.gov if you're in the market for health insurance. In the meantime, here are more tips for simplifying the health care shopping process, whether you choose the federal plan or a plan that's not offered on the exchange.

To save on health care costs, focus on a health plan with the highest deductible. The act is designed around cost sharing. It offers four plan types: Bronze, in which 60 percent of health care costs are covered by insurance companies with 40 percent of health care expenses paid by consumers, with the lowest monthly premium; Silver (70 percent covered, 30 percent paid for by consumers); Gold (80 percent, 20 percent paid for by consumers); and Platinum (90 percent of costs covered, with 10 percent paid for by consumers, with the highest monthly premium).

For each of these plan types, the essential health benefits are standard. Under the act, all health plans must include coverage for ambulatory patient services (outpatient care you get without being admitted to a hospital), emergency services, hospitalization (such as surgery), maternity and newborn care (before and after your baby is born), mental health and substance use disorder services, including behavioral health treatment (this includes counseling and psychotherapy), prescription drugs, rehabilitative and habilitative services and devices (services and devices to help people with injuries, disabilities, or chronic conditions gain or recover mental and physical skills), laboratory services, preventive and wellness services and chronic disease management and pediatric service.

Crunch the numbers

When choosing a plan in general, Woodfield recommends opting for



the health insurance plan with the lowest annual cost to you.

“More often than not, that’s the plan with the lowest premium,” Woodfield says. Her motto: “Keep fixed expenses low,” so you’ll have the least amount of money automatically going out of your pocket every month. When you pay the lowest monthly premium possible, you’ll generally pay less overall in overall medical care expenses.

Skeptical? Do the math. Woodfield suggests adding up the total annual premium of the Affordable Care Act or other health plans you’re considering plus the total cost of your predictable medical expenses per year. Keep in mind that under the act, preventive health services for you and your children, including your annual mammogram and wellness visit and their routine immunizations and well-child visits are free with no copay or coinsurance required, for all U.S. health plans.

“Go online to your current carrier and look at your claims last year for medical tests, you and your family’s doctor’s visits, and prescriptions,” Woodfield says. If, for instance, your total medical costs for the year added up to \$6,000, on the (60-40) Bronze

plan, you’ll have to pay 40 percent of those costs, or \$2,400 and your premium, at say, \$100 per month, will be \$1,200 annually, for a total of \$3,600. If you’re on the (70-30) Silver plan, with a \$200 monthly premium, you’ll pay \$1,800 in medical costs and \$2,400 in premiums, for a total annual cost of \$4,200, and so on.

Get the idea? In general, the higher your premium, the more you’ll pay out of pocket overall for medical coverage. Still, plug your numbers into the various plans options and see for yourself.

“Go with the plan that is predictably going to cost you the least,” Woodfield says.

Health savings account

Sign up for a Health Savings Account. Consider allocating what you’d otherwise pay in a monthly premium into a health savings account, which is a fund that must be used for qualified medical expenses. Then, pay for health care as you go, just like you do for groceries or gas. The IRS deems what’s an acceptable medical expense for a health savings account, but its list is much more comprehensive than the services a health insurance company

will cover, which is an added bonus.

For example, “The IRS allows you to deduct acupuncture, chiropractic care, and orthodontic care,” Woodfield says. Many health insurance plans don’t cover them. For more information about health savings accounts, visit the website for the IRS: www.irs.gov/publications/p969/index.html. If you’re not eligible for an HSA, a personal savings account designated for medical expenses will do.

Consider add-on products. Monthly health insurance premiums never go away, but medical service costs do. Even if you have a major medical expense you can’t predict, like having an emergency C-section or a child who needs to be hospitalized, the maximum you’ll have to personally pay for all of your medical expenses on all Affordable Care Act plans is \$6,350 for an individual or \$12,700 for a family annually. The Platinum plan is an exception. It has an out-of-pocket annual maximum of \$4,000 for an individual and \$8,000 for a family.

Supplemental health products

“For many people, \$8,000 or \$12,700 could be a significant per-

centage of their after-tax income,” Stahl says. Still, a large percentage of Healthmarket’s customers choose low-premium, high-deductible plans. “For those customers, we often counsel them to add supplemental health products, like an accident, disability or a hospitalization plan, which can very inexpensively offset a whole host of out-of-pocket expenses, including that big deductible they took on,” he says.

Choose a plan with providers you currently use. To keep medical costs low, it pays to stay in-network. If your doctor or your child’s pediatrician isn’t listed as a provider for a health plan you’re considering, call the doctor’s office to double check. Because of the Affordable Care Act, physicians are re-evaluating the health insurance options, too.

For more information about the Affordable Care Act and health insurance in general, visit The Alliance for Health Reform, www.allhealth.org.

Sandra Gordon is an award-winning freelance writer who delivers expert advice and the latest developments in health, nutrition, parenting, and consumer issues. Her most recent book is “Save a Bundle: 50+ Ways to Save Big on Baby Gear.”

Value of Catholic schools

Why parents choose this effective alternative

BY CANDI SPARKS

At a time when the New York City public school system is under so much criticism and revision, working families have found an alternative in the Catholic school system. These schools have historically been the ones to reach out to and support communities in need.

Years ago, hundreds of thousands of immigrants came to the New World to have a fresh start. They put in long hours at low-level jobs, striving for greater opportunity and a better life for their children. It was a financial sacrifice for these immigrants to send their children to Catholic schools, rather than through the public school system, but to them, it was well worth it.

The public schools in their working-class neighborhoods were largely overcrowded and not necessarily providing top-notch education. In order to be more assured that their children would be taught their values — including discipline, which was a rigorous part of their children's life at home — they decided to send their children through a parochial school system, even if it meant struggling to find the extra money to pay for it.

In the early days of the immigration wave, it was primarily Irish and Italian immigrants that sent their children to Catholic parochial schools. As the years went by and new immigrants came from more



countries and continents, the demographic shifted and one didn't necessarily have to be Catholic to choose this educational option. As a result, many Catholic schools throughout the city have continued as an integral part of our citywide school landscape.

Currently, Catholic schools serve more than 160 nationalities. With each wave of immigration — Hispanic, Asian, Slavic and many others — Catholic schools offer diversity. These schools are not just racially diverse; there is also religious diversity in the Catholic school system. In fact, non-Catholics comprise about one quarter of the student body.

"Catholic schools are not just meant for the faithful. We are here to grow faith by building community and reaching out to those in need," says Tom O'Brien, of the Brooklyn Diocese, which is involved in raising scholarship funds to help families offset tuition. "But not every Catholic school family is in great economic need. Our demographic is changing. We have seen an influx of middle income families who choose Catholic school because of the class size, excellence in education, and for a safer environment than what most par-

ents think the neighborhood public school would offer."

Patty, a public school teacher from the Bronx, sends her son Ronald to a Catholic elementary school.

"The environment stresses academics and doing the right thing," she says. "The teachers set high standards for the children. They are expected to do well and they rise to the occasion."

Many Catholic school students are the first ones in their families to graduate from college. In low-income neighborhoods, this means that the school is providing the lion's share of educational support for children who do not have access to private tutoring or help at home.

There is a 99 percent graduation rate for Catholic high schools, followed by a 97 percent college graduation rate for those who graduated Catholic high school. Compared to the 41 percent public high school graduation rate, Catholic school students have a better success rate. They are guided up the ladder of growth and achievement, making a real difference for present and future generations. Overall, Catholic school seems to outperform public school and is a viable, less-expensive sys-

tem of education in the private sector.

In fact, the only two private schools in New York State that were designated by the U.S. Department of Education as Blue Ribbon — a program that honors public and private elementary, middle, and high schools whose students achieve at very high levels, or schools that make significant progress in closing the achievement gap — in 2011 were both Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of New York. The honorees were St. Ignatius Loyola School on E. 84th Street in Manhattan and St. Ignatius on Mott Street in Manhattan. This year's honorees show the excellence in education and the diverse population served by Catholic schools. The incentives for getting a Catholic school education are different than what they used to be, and this is changing the demographics of Catholic school students.

"Families that don't have money don't usually have many choices. We needed to find a school with the right mix for Benny. He really wanted to play baseball. The only school that we could find to bridge the gap was a Catholic school. We are all very happy with the switch," says Elizabeth, a Brooklyn mother of two, who chose to send her son to a Catholic school with solid academics and a baseball program.

Likewise, Patty, of East Harlem, sends her daughter Amber to a bilingual Catholic school.

"My daughter goes to a school that gives her [education] in both languages," says Patty. "Sure, they speak the same languages in the public school around the corner, but it is unofficial. The public school does not have the same structure." Amber's Catholic school is also closely related to other parish activities and offers bilingual masses, events and service projects for the community. This makes the Catholic school a great way for Patty and Amber to meet people of similar backgrounds and build a community. Parochial schools celebrate the tradition of faith, family and community.

Unfortunately, keeping these schools open has become a challenge. The Catholic school sector is no different than any other, and closings have been publicized. In response, Catholic schools are researching and developing new educational business models. Some Catholic schools have closed their

doors, only to reopen as academies. For example, in South Ozone Park, the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary School and St. Stanislaus Bishop and Martyr School closed their doors, only to be succeeded by the Divine Mercy Catholic Academy. Because the school involves more than one parish, the school is called an academy to differentiate it from a single-parish school. Since 2005, the Brooklyn Diocese has opened many Catholic academies in Brooklyn and Queens.

The Brooklyn Diocese has also implemented the program "Preserving the Vision." The name means exactly what it says: preserving what has always been an integral part of Catholic life: the education of children. This vision includes developing schools that will be better able to meet the diverse and changing needs of students and parents, and providing competitive compensation and benefits to teachers and staff.

Even though two schools in the Archdiocese of New York have won the 2011 Blue Ribbon Award, the organization is still committed to improving. The Archdiocese has initiated the "Pathways to Excellence" program, aimed at professional development for principals, teachers and staff at schools that already do outstanding work. Because of the diverse population, there is still more than can be done to close the achievement gap. The program is aimed at raising standardized test scores and providing teachers with new classroom tools, such as the digital teaching program for fourth and fifth grade math, "Time to Know," which provides online learning, data collection and feedback for the school.

Personally, I am proud to share that my fondest childhood memories revolve around a humble beginning, in a humble neighborhood. My siblings and I attended a Catholic elementary school, Our Lady of Victory, for eight years. I am pleased that Catholic schools are committed to remaining vibrant institutions for generations to come.

Candi Sparks is the author of children's books about money including "Can I Have Some Money? Educating Children About Money," "Max Gets It!" and "Nacho Money." She is a Brooklyn mother of two and is on Facebook (Candi Sparks, author) and Twitter (Candi Sparks, author). Her website is www.candisparks.com.



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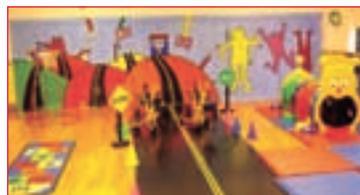
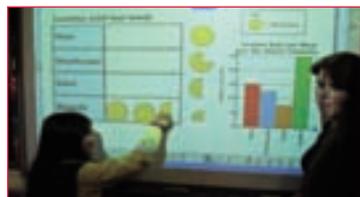
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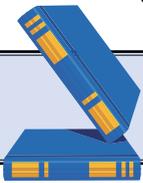
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Behind the Screens

Why parents need to monitor their children's media consumption

BY KIKI BOCHI

Technology is turning up in some surprising places these days. First there was the iPotty, launched last year so toddlers could play with an iPad while conducting the oh-so-boring business of, well, doing their business. More recently, Fisher-Price created a furor when it unveiled the iPad Apptivity Seat, a bouncy seat that suspends an iPad directly in front of a newborn baby's face.

Smartphones and tablets have become today's pacifiers, keeping babies and kids quiet and occupied in the car, at the store, and while waiting for food at the restaurant. But in the bathroom?

And do babies really need technology before they can even sit up?

Child development experts are worried.

"Although it is tempting for parents to offer their babies and toddlers an iPad, it is not a replacement for the important relationship building that occurs through playful parent-child interactions," says Dr. Roni Cohen Leiderman, dean of the Mailman Segal Center for Human Development at Nova Southeastern University.

As children grow, the television is not only entertainment, it is also the babysitter, the best friend, and the reward system. In many homes the television is often on all day and evening, whether or not anyone is watching.

If you are an average parent, none of this is any big surprise to you. But the nation's pediatricians want to warn you — again — that kids need clear limits on media use. If nothing else, it certainly is something to think about as you make your New Year's resolutions.

Excessive media use has been associated with obesity, lack of sleep, school problems, aggression, and other behavior issues.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has advised for quite some time that babies and toddlers get no exposure at all to television and video screens, and that kids above age 2 be allowed to have no more than two hours of screen time daily.

"For nearly three decades, the

A 'media-use' family plan

The American Academy of Pediatrics urges parents to make a "media-use plan" for their families and set clear rules about TV, cellphones and other devices. Their suggestions include:

- For children under age 2, substitute unstructured play and human interaction for screen time. The opportunity to think creatively, problem-solve, and develop reasoning and motor skills is more valuable for the developing brain than passive media intake.
- For older children, take into ac-

count not only the quantity, but the quality and location of media use. Consider TVs, phones, tablets, and computers. The rules should be

written down and agreed upon by all family members.

- Screens should be kept out of children's bedrooms. Put in place a "media curfew" at mealtime and bedtime, putting all devices away or plugging them into a charging station for the night.
- Take an active role in your children's media education by

co-viewing programs with them and discussing the shows. Look for media choices that are educational or teach good values — such as empathy, racial, and ethnic tolerance. Choose programming that models good interpersonal skills for children to emulate.

- Be firm about not allowing your child to view content that is not age appropriate, such as shows or movies that feature sex, drugs, violence, etc. Movie and TV ratings exist for good reason, and online movie reviews also can help parents get informed about content and stick to their rules.

- The internet can be a wonder-

ful place for learning. But it also is a place where kids can run into trouble. Keep the computer in a public part of your home, so you can check on what your kids are doing online and how much time they are spending there.

- Talk to your children about being good "digital citizens," and discuss the serious consequences of online bullying. If your child is the victim of cyberbullying, it is important to take action with the other parents and the school, if appropriate. Attend to children's and teens' mental health needs promptly if they are being bullied online, and consider separating them from the social media platforms where bullying occurs.





A.A.P. has expressed concerns about the amount of time that children and teenagers spend with media, and about some of the content they are viewing,” Dr. Victor Strasburger said in a statement when the report was released. “The digital age has only made these issues more pressing.”

In today’s world, the average child spends about eight hours in front of screens each day, according to the pediatrician’s organization. That makes screen time the leading activity for young people after sleep.

The pediatricians — many of whom are parents themselves — are trying to be realistic about the situation. There are many positives that can come from media use, they concede. Educational television such as “Sesame Street” can be stimulating to young minds, while other shows such as “Dora the Explorer” expose young children to Spanish. Educational television for older kids can help teach about history, nature, geography, and other cultures.

The internet is a critical tool for homework, and social media helps older kids feel connected. But when it comes to products such as the iPotty and iPad bouncy seat, experts urge parents to approach with caution.

“Nurturance is the key to developing your child’s healthy emotional intelligence and that requires time, attention, and touch with a caring adult,” Leiderman says. “Watch a small child with an electronic device and you will see a mesmerized focus on the screen. At first blush that may seem appropriate — and for short periods of time it may be. Children may, in fact, be learning some concepts and are certainly giving parents time off, but they are not getting the full dimension of learning [that] takes place with a caring adult.”

For example, Leiderman says, a story “read” by a computerized voice on an iPad cannot match the tonal quality and warm interchanges that happen when family members have their baby cuddled in their lap as they read the book with pauses, questions, pointing, and responses to their baby’s giggles and interests.

If parents simply can’t resist putting such gadgets in front of their child, restraint is key.

“Think of it like a treat for your baby or toddler,” Leiderman advises. “Once in a while is fine, but you wouldn’t want to make steady diet of it.”

KiKi Bochi is a freelance writer and editor who specializes in family health and child development.

Gay families

Finding resources & support

Part two of
a series on
lesbian, gay,
bisexual, and
transgender
families

BY ALLISON PLITT

The gay and lesbian rights movement has scored big victories in the last few years, including the legalization of same-sex marriage in several states across the country and the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act, giving legally married, same-sex couples more than 1,100 protections and rights of marriage that were previously denied to them.

As more states legalize gay and lesbian marriage, more and more same-sex couples are starting to consider marriage and the possibility of having children. As a result, there will be a greater need for support groups and resources for these couples as they begin the process of starting their families. Here are several organizations that offer resources to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals, couples, and spouses.

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center has been a stalwart organization in its steadfast support of alternative relationships and families for the past 30 years. Located in Chelsea, the Center “provides quality health and wellness programs in a welcoming space that fosters connections and celebrates our cultural contributions. The Center provides a secure place to come together and plan, share knowledge and expertise, and to share our future as a vibrant community in New York and around the world,” according to its mission statement.

The Center offers a program called Center Families, which has been in existence for more than 20 years and serves as a model for same-sex family organizing. In addition to providing opportunities for families to meet and befriend each other, the program has support groups for gay and lesbian parents and prospective parents, individuals and couples, and counseling, free legal clinics,



and other networking opportunities for those living in the tri-state area.

Some of the support groups offered by Center Families deal with foster care and adoption for same-sex individuals and couples. Another support group is called Biological Parenting for Men and is co-led by Howard May, a psychologist who devotes 50 percent of his practice to working around relationship issues with gay men. Married and living in Chelsea, May and his husband, Darren Rosenblum, decided to conceive their daughter through gestational surrogacy, in which one woman is the egg provider and another woman carries the fetus.

“Essentially, it’s a support group

for men who are thinking about biological parenting, so it’s specifically geared towards surrogacy,” says May of his program. “What we do each month is a drop-in group, so whoever wants to come can come. People come in during all different stages of the surrogacy process. Some of the questions people may ask are ‘How do you do surrogacy?’ ‘How do you find a surrogate?’ ‘Are there agencies?’ or ‘I am already into the process, and how do I deal with my agency?’ ‘I have a concern about the health or behavior of my surrogate, how do I deal with that?’ We talk about these kinds of issues.”

May discusses in his group the impact of becoming parents, and

how it affects the relationships of men who are part of a couple. First, the men discuss why each partner wants to become a parent. Then the group members talk about how they have been handling the parenting process, if they have adequate support in raising their children, how they're dealing with the reactions of others, and what impact they think parenting is having on their relationship.

May's advice to couples who are considering starting a family?

"The only really specific advice that I have is talk about it. Vocalize your concerns. Don't be afraid of expressing whatever your fears are, because when you express them...they can be addressed."

Similar to the services his group provides, May also recommends a website called Men Having Babies, a non-profit organization that spun off from a program at the Center. Men Having Babies began as a peer support network in 2005 for biological gay fathers and fathers-to-be. It offers monthly workshops on a broad range of topics and holds an annual global seminar. As its online resources have developed, it has been able to reach out to more than 1,000 men from around the world.

May and Rosenblum used an organization called Circle Surrogacy to conceive their child. Based out of Boston, Circle Surrogacy is one of the oldest and largest surrogacy agencies serving gay parents all over the world. With more than 17 years of experience, the agency thoroughly screens prospective LGBT parents and matches them with gay-friendly surrogates and egg donors. The agency also believes that all parties in the birthing process should openly know and communicate with each other, which will eventually have a healthy impact on the child as he grows up and wants to know about his birth.

Another organization that May refers same-sex families to is The Family Equality Council, which has been in existence for more than 30 years. Originally called the Gay Fathers Coalition, the group in later years came to include lesbian moms and bisexual and transgender parents. The Council says its purpose is to connect, support, and represent this country's three million parents who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, and their six million children.

May and his husband and daughter attended the group's "Family

Week" last summer in Provincetown, Mass. Celebrating its 17th anniversary, "Family Week" has always been a joint venture hosted by the Council and COLAGE, another national LGBT family support group.

"For one week, this kind of gay family resort in Massachusetts on Cape Cod is almost entirely gay people with kids," May recalled. "They just bring people together. There's programming the whole week. There are lectures. There are playgroups for the kids. There are different types of events based on the age of your kid. This was the first time we had gone, and it was really quite amazing. There were people from all over the country."

Another advocate of the Family Equality Council is one of its Board of Directors, William Sherr, who lives near Park Slope, Brooklyn, with his husband, Estevan Garcia, and their three adopted children. For the past 13 years, Sherr and Garcia have opened their home to more than 20 foster children and adopted one of them. Besides taking care of his family, Sherr runs a service called OutbabyNYC, which caters to the needs of same-sex families.

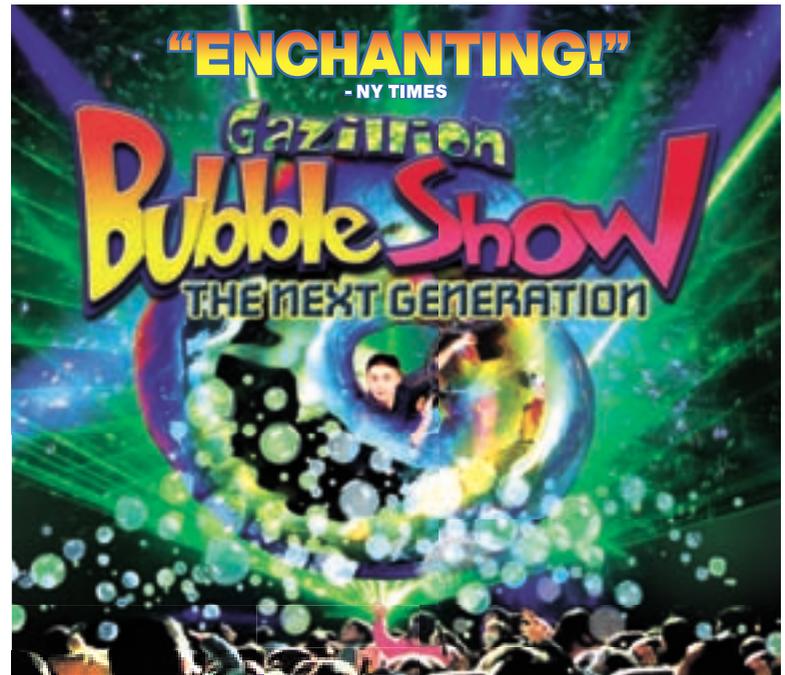
"We work on changing attitudes and policies, so that all families are respected and celebrated," says Sherr. "They really just try to get us to come together and raise our voices to ensure full legal and social equality for all families."

Through the Council, Sherr and Garcia held a mixer for family equality at their home this past November. The couple also chairs an annual dinner at Chelsea Piers in the spring to help raise money for the Council. This year the "Night at the Pier" dinner will be held on May 12, 2014, and tickets can be purchased on the Council's website events page.

How can straight families support same-sex families?

"Talk to your kids about how all families are equal and that all families are different," says Sherr. "If they have the means and wanted to donate to the Family Equality Council, they can see what their works are doing. If they live in New York, plan to attend 'Night at the Pier' in May and show [their] support for the Family Equality Council."

Allison Plitt is a freelance writer who lives in Queens with her husband and young daughter. She is a frequent contributor to *New York Parenting*.



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ALISON ARDEN BESUNDER,
ESQ.

Get organized in 2014

Without fail, my busiest months are January and December. In January, clients want to get started on their New Year's resolution to get their legal documents prepared and signed. In December, clients who resolved to "get prepared" in the New Year can't believe that year has gone by, and are determined not to let another year go by without fulfilling their promise!

In addition to getting your estate planning documents in order or up to date (your will, health care proxy, and power of attorney, among others), this month's column is dedicated to some other manageable resolutions to make for 2013.

January: Max out your flexible spending accounts. Recover the funds you spent in 2013. You can submit for reimbursement for expenses up until March 31 for expenses incurred prior to Dec. 31, 2013. Take a moment to schedule your annual appointments with your primary care physician, pediatricians, dentist, eye doctor, and others.

February: April 15 will be here before you know it. Make an appointment with your accountant and start gathering all the documents you'll need. If you have money management software, start running reports and cleaning up your data. The sooner you file, the sooner you'll get a refund.

March: Go looking for hidden treasure. Find some money you didn't know you had, just in case you owe taxes! Banks, insurance companies, utilities, and other businesses are required by law to surrender inactive accounts which are "lost," "abandoned," or "unclaimed" to the state. The state comptroller serves as custodian of the money, and if you can prove you're entitled to it, it's yours. Search your name to see if the state is holding your money and to complete the necessary forms at www.osc.state.ny.us/ouf/index.htm

April: Insure your peace of mind. Review your life, disability, homeowners, and auto policies to make



sure they're sufficient for your needs and that your beneficiaries are correctly named and up to date.

May: Are your passports up to date? Do you have passports for your children? You need passports for your infant children if you are planning to travel overseas in the summer months. In addition to other requirements, the process for children requires the children to be present with both parents (or for one parent to have a properly signed authorization and a copy of the other parent's driver's license). Check http://travel.state.gov/passport/get/get_4855.html for more.

June: Medical authorizations. Make sure all your children's camps, child care facilities, and care givers have a medical authorization in the event that you or your spouse or partner cannot be reached. Parents should also have a "stand-by guardian" form for instances where they are unable to communicate due to emergencies. Adults should also have their health care proxies up to date.

July and August: Relax at the beach knowing you've crossed so many important items off your list.

September: Back to school! Purge the clutter. It's a good idea to keep tax returns and back-up documentation for five years. Insurance policies should be kept indefinitely. Utility bills should be tossed within one month. All the rest can go.

October: Tax loss and profit selling. Don't wait until Dec. 31 to sell un-

der-performing investments as tax-losses to offset capital gains, such as those that accrue from mutual fund dividends at year-end. You can purchase the same or a similar asset 31 days after the sale, keeping in mind that purchasing at a lower price will re-set your cost basis. At the time of writing this month's column, no decision had yet been made as to the "fiscal cliff" and the fate of the capital gains and dividend tax. Nonetheless, the last quarter of any year is a good time to consider selling profitable stocks that can be set-off against losses and re-purchased in 31 days.

November: Make annual gifts. The federal government allows tax-free gifts of \$13,000 (\$26,000 if you are married and "split gifts") to each individual per year (including your own children!) This is a good opportunity to start shifting some of your own assets to your children — preferably by setting up a minor's trust that dictates how and when the money gets spent and distributed to the children. Don't forget grandparents who may be inclined to take advantage of this exemption as well, but also may want to protect the gift from creditors and spendthrift children by placing it in a trust.

December: Spend wisely. While in the mode of holiday shopping, consider some tax-smart purchases, such as charitable contributions, paying tax-deductible expenses such as real estate taxes, quarterly state or local income taxes, investment-related expenses, and dues before year end. December is also a great time to evaluate how close your spending went compared to plans for the year, and set a new budget for the year ahead.

Alison Arden Besunder is the founding attorney of the law firm of Arden Besunder P.C., where she assists new and not-so-new parents with their estate planning needs. Her firm assists clients in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Nassau, and Suffolk Counties. You can find Besunder on Twitter @estatetrustplan and on her website at www.besunderlaw.com.

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GOOD SENSE EATING

CHRISTINE M. PALUMBO, RD

What is 'natural' food?

It's important for Jamie Steckler to serve her growing family a natural diet.

"Eating naturally means eating more fresh, whole foods, and fewer processed foods and artificial ingredients. It means paying more attention to what our foods are made with," she says.

It's a hot marketing tool. According to research by the International Food Information Council Foundation, 36 percent of consumers buy food and beverages because they are advertised as "natural" on the label.

'Naturally' vague

Some people say the term "natural" has been so overused and misused it has lost its meaning. Is frozen pizza "natural?" And how natural can hot dogs, iced tea, ice cream, salad dressing, or snack chips be?

Unlike "organic" foods, which must adhere to a strict set of rules, the Food and Drug Administration has yet to define the term "natural" on food labels. A vague informal policy written more than 20 years ago defined it to mean "nothing artificial or synthetic ... is included in, or has been added to, the product that would not normally be expected to be there."

In contrast, the U.S. Drug Administration, which regulates milk and meat, has defined it. Fresh meat or poultry labeled "natural" cannot contain artificial flavorings, colors, chemical preservatives, or artificial or synthetic ingredients. It can only be "minimally processed," although flavor injections are allowed.

What may be surprising is this:



Products containing genetically modified organism ingredients may be labeled as "natural." For example, some natural breakfast cereals contain genetically modified corn, soy, canola, or sugar beets. Keep in mind that there is no actual evidence genetically modified organism ingredients pose a health risk, although it remains controversial among consumer groups and scientists alike.

A bill proposing sweeping changes to food labeling laws covering "natural" claims and more was introduced in September. It says manufacturers should not describe as "natural" products that contain artificial ingredients.

This includes flavors and colors or ingredients that have undergone chemical changes. Examples given are corn syrup, chemically modified starch, and cocoa processed with alkali. Legal experts say the bill stands

little chance of success, however.

Until the FDA acts

"Start making one change at a time, not a complete food overhaul. Trade up your current foods for better choices," advises Steckler, who is also a Chicago-based registered dietitian nutritionist specializing in families and pediatrics.

Ignore most front-of-pack claims and look at the ingredients instead.

"If you are looking to cut out processed foods, start by reading the ingredient label. If you see capital letters, colors, or numbers listed, skip it," she says.

Christine Palumbo is a Chicago-area registered dietitian nutritionist who is a new Fellow of the American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Follow her on Twitter @PalumboRD, Facebook at Christine Palumbo Nutrition, or Chris@ChristinePalumbo.com.

Winter Egnog

Here's a lightened-up festive drink to enjoy with your children.

Makes four servings (2/3 cup each)

INGREDIENTS:

1-1/3 cups low fat milk
 1/2 cup fat-free liquid egg substitute
 2 tbsp sweetened condensed milk
 2 ice cubes
 1 tsp vanilla extract
 Optional: 1/4 cup brandy or rum for adults only

DIRECTIONS: Place all the ingredients in a blender. Cover and blend until frothy. (Or place into a large bowl and use a stick blender.) Pour into glasses and sprinkle each with a little freshly ground nutmeg.

NUTRITION INFORMATION: 90 calories (120 with brandy), 11 grams carbohydrates, 7 grams protein, 1.5 grams fat (1 gram sat fat), 5 milligrams cholesterol, 115 milligrams sodium, 260 IU vitamin A, 142 milligrams calcium, 1 milligram iron

Calendar

JANUARY



Photo by Andrew Kelly

Bring home a piece of the holidays

The stunning display Gingerbread Lane at the New York Hall of Science is coming to a close, but at the Gingerbread Lane House Giveaway, you can walk away with a piece of it on Jan. 12.

The houses will be given out on a first-come, first-served basis.

These houses are in great demand! For your chance to score one, get there early.

Gingerbread giveaway on Jan. 12 at 10 am. Free with museum admission.

New York Hall of Science [47-01 111th St. in Corona, (718) 699-0005 www.nysci.org/event].

Calendar

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Send your listing request to queenscalendar@cnglocal.com — and we'll take care of the rest. Please e-mail requests more than three weeks prior to the event to ensure we have enough time to get it in. And best of all, it's FREE!

TUES, DEC. 31

FURTHER AFIELD

Ice carving: Bronx Zoo, 2300 Southern Blvd. at Boston Road, the Bronx; (718) 220-5103; www.bronxzoo.com; 10 am-4 pm; Free with zoo admission.

Professional ice carvers demonstrate the art and make wildlife-themed sculptures, with an interactive play area and an ice-carving contest.

WED, JAN. 1

IN QUEENS

"Emmet Otter's Jug-Band Christmas": Museum of the Moving Image, 36-01 35th Ave.; (718) 777-6888; www.movingimage.us; 1 pm; Free with museum admission.

Enjoy this screening of the popular TV special as part of the Jim Henson's World exhibit.

Holiday Puppet Party Workshop: Museum of the Moving Image, 36-01 35th Ave.; (718) 777-6888; www.movingimage.us; 2:15 pm & 3:30 pm; \$10.

Children become puppet makers and performers in this hour-long holiday workshop that allows them to make their own characters.

THURS, JAN. 2

IN QUEENS

Kwanzaa Film Screening: Laurelton Public Library, 134-26 225th St. at Merrick Boulevard; (718) 528-2822; www.queenslibrary.org; 4:30 pm; Free.

Celebrate Kwanzaa with the film "The Black Candle."

FURTHER AFIELD

Celestial Polar Express: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, Manhattan; (212) 769-5200; www.amnh.org/calendar/celestial-polar-express; 6:30 pm; \$15, \$13.50 (seniors and students), \$12 (members).

This lecture will discuss polaris, and the difference between the poles.



Music fest comes to Flushing

Flushing Town Hall celebrates 35 years of providing cultural programs for families with a concert by Trio Cavatina, as part of the Five Boroughs Music Festival.

Listen to the classical music of Beethoven and Bach as you haven't heard it before, with pianist Leva Jokubaviciute, violinist

Harumi Rhodes, and cellist Priscilla Lee.

Jan. 12 at 3 pm. \$25 and \$20 for members and Queens residents. \$15 for students.

Flushing Town Hall [137-35 Northern Blvd., at Linden Place, in Flushing, (718) 463-7700, www.flushingtownhall.org/events/event.php?id=1123].

This program includes a snack, live animals, (sorry, no polar bears), and a nature walk (weather permitting).

FURTHER AFIELD

Target First Saturday: Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Pkwy. at Washington Avenue, Brooklyn; (718) 638-5000; www.brooklynmuseum.org; 5-11 pm; Free.

Music, entertainment, and fun activities.

MON, JAN. 6

IN QUEENS

Play Gym Open House: Central Queens YM and YWHA, 67-09 108th

St. between 67th Avenue and 67th Road; (718) 268-5011; www.centralqueensy.org; 10:15-11:45 am; Free.

Children can explore the large play area while parents meet the teachers from the Tiny Tumblers, Gym Explorers, and Gym Adventurers programs.

TUES, JAN. 7

IN QUEENS

Young Men's Empowerment

Group: Laurelton Public Library, 134-26 225th St. at Merrick Boulevard; (718) 528-2822; www.queenslibrary.org; 3:30 pm; Free.

This program for young men ages 14 to 19 will cover many topics, including but not limited to alcohol and drug abuse, bullying, and career and job readiness.

WED, JAN. 8

IN QUEENS

Lincoln Center Local HD Screening:

Laurelton Public Library, 41-17 Main St. at Parsons Boulevard; (718) 661-1200; www.queenslibrary.org; 11 am; Free.

Enjoy a screening of a "Live From Lincoln Center" production, which features Audra McDonald, Broadway and television stars, and the New York Philharmonic in a tribute to composer Marvin Hamlisch.

Exploring Comics: Woodhaven Public Library, 85-41 Forest Pkwy.; (718) 849-1010; www.queenslibrary.org; 4:30 pm; Free.

Children and teens ages 8-15 learn how comics work and make their own comic.

Monthly Jazz Clinic: Flushing Town Hall, 137-35 Northern Boulevard; (718) 463-7700; www.flushingtownhall.org; 5-7 pm; Free.

If you're interested in learning more about jazz and playing alongside other musicians, join the Queens Jazz OverGround for its monthly Jazz Clinic.

Monthly Jazz Jam: Flushing Town Hall, 137-35 Northern Blvd.; (718) 463-7700; www.flushingtownhall.org; 7-10 pm; \$10, Free for performers, members, and students.

Meet new contacts, hone your chops and jam each month with your peers. Not a musician? Enjoy listening to the music.

THURS, JAN. 9

IN QUEENS

3D Printing Workshop: Far Rockaway Public Library, 1637 Central Ave. at Mott Avenue; (718) 327-2549; www.queenslibrary.org; 3:30 pm; Free.

Continued on page 30

Continued from page 29

In this class, students will use a computer to learn fundamentals of design, engineering, and architecture, then see a 3D printer produce their design right in front of their eyes.

Robotics Workshop: Poppenhusen Public Library, 121-23 14 Ave. at College Point Boulevard; (718) 359-1102; 4 pm; Free.

Learn to design and program real robots in this hands-on class, where children will use a laptop and robot parts to inspire creativity and teach important engineering concepts.

FRI, JAN. 10

IN QUEENS

David Hazeltine Trio: Flushing Town Hall, 137-35 Northern Blvd.; (718) 463-7700; www.flushingtownhall.org; 8 pm; \$15, \$10 (students and members).

David Hazeltine is a pianist who has successfully forged his own distinctive style and musical voice, with drum legend Louis Hayes and bassist Peter Washington.

FURTHER AFIELD

Take Wing!: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, Manhattan; (212) 769-5200; www.amnh.org/calendar/take-wing!-grades-1-and-2; 4:30 pm; \$125, \$115 members.

Children in first and second grades will observe live butterflies in an indoor tropical rainforest.

A Night at the Museum Sleepover: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, Manhattan; (212) 769-5200; www.amnh.org/calendar/a-night-at-the-museum-sleepover-friday-january-10-2014; 6 pm; \$145 per person, \$135 (Members).

This unique sleepover will delight children ages 6 to 13 and their caregivers. The night includes tours of live-animal exhibitions, museum quests, and more.

SAT, JAN. 11

IN QUEENS

Science Fair 101: Alley Pond Environmental Center, 228-06 Northern Blvd.; (718) 229-4000; www.alleypond.com/index.html; 1:30 pm; \$24.

From hypothesis to conclusion, children will get hands on experience to collectively create an innovative Science Fair Project that is sure to impress any Science teacher.

Storytime Safari: Alley Pond Environmental Center, 228-06 Northern Blvd.; (718) 229-4000; 1:30 pm; \$18.

This program includes games, songs,

'Awake' at New Victory



Photo by Elizabeth Honey

The enchanting tale of Miss Ivory Tinklefinger comes to the stage at New Victory Theatre in "Still Awake Still!" from Jan. 18 to 20.

A great grand piano and her voice are all she needs to lull even the most rambunctious children to sleep, until her piano starts producing more than melodic notes, much to her dismay and to the audience's delight. This show is just the latest in a series of family-friendly productions offered by New Victory Theatre, and is sure to keep your family laughing and singing long after the show is over.

Jan. 18-20 at 11 am and 3 pm on weekdays, and at 11 am on Monday. \$14-\$25.

The New Victory Theatre [209 W. 42nd St. between Seventh and Eighth avenues in Times Square, (646) 223-3010, www.newvictory.org/Show-Detail.aspx?ProductionId=5190].

a snack, a craft, live animals, and a nature walk (weather permitting).

"Tiger Tales" Chinese Shadow Plays: Flushing Public Library, 41-17 Main St. at Parsons Boulevard; (718) 661-1200; www.queenslibrary.org; 1:30 pm; Free.

A wise old rabbit tells her granddaughter about some of the adventures of her eventful life, including her hair-raising encounters with Tiger, the reigning King of the Jungle.

"Songs of Freedom": Central Library, 89-11 Merrick Blvd.; (718) 990-0700; www.queenslibrary.org; 3 pm; Free.

Robbi K and Friends commemorate the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech with a performance of protest and freedom songs.

SUN, JAN. 12

IN QUEENS

Gingerbread Lane House Giveaway: New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111th St. at Avenue of Science; (718) 699-0005 X 353; www.ny-science.org; 10 am-Noon; Free with museum admission.

Gingerbread houses will be given away on a first-come, first-served basis, while supplies last.

Recycled and Repurposed Children's Crafts: Queens Botanical Garden, 43-50 Main St.; (718) 539-5296; www.queensbotanical.org; 1-3 pm; Free.

Children will be making crafts out of recycled and repurposed items.

APEC Adventure Hour: Alley Pond Environmental Center, 228-06 Northern Blvd.; (718) 229-4000; 1:30 pm; \$16.

Theme-related activities include live animals, art project, outdoor play, trail walks, and music for toddlers and their caregivers.

Trio Cavatina — Five Boroughs Music Festival: Flushing Town Hall, 137-35 Northern Blvd.; (718) 463-7700; www.flushingtownhall.org; 3 pm; \$25, \$20 (Members & Queens Residents,) \$15 (Students).

Five Boroughs Music Festival returns to present Trio Cavatina, winners of the 2009 Naumburg International Chamber Music Competition.

TUES, JAN. 14

IN QUEENS

Young Men's Empowerment Group: 3:30 pm. Laurelton Public Library. See Tuesday, Jan. 7.

THURS, JAN. 16

IN QUEENS

Robotics Workshop: 4 pm. Poppenhusen Public Library. See Thursday, Jan. 9.

FRI, JAN. 17

FURTHER AFIELD

Take Wing!: 4:30 pm. American Museum of Natural History. See Friday, Jan. 10.

SAT, JAN. 18

IN QUEENS

Young Discoverers Club: Alley Pond Environmental Center, 228-06 Northern Blvd.; (718) 229-4000; 10:30 am; \$24.

Learn about the environment through studies and tests, some can be done with simple household supplies.

Bear Necessities: 10:30 am. Alley Pond Environmental Center. See Saturday, Jan. 4.

Saturday Science Lab: Central Library, 89-11 Merrick Blvd.; (718) 990-0700; www.queenslibrary.org; 11 am; Free.

Children ages 6-12 explore the world and have hands-on science fun with the Discovery Team.

Nature Nook: Alley Pond Environmental Center, 228-06 Northern Blvd.; (718) 229-4000; Noon; Free.

Make the most of the short daylight hours — bundle up and hit the trails around Alley Pond Park.

A Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: Central Library, 89-11 Merrick Blvd.; (718) 990-0700; www.queenslibrary.org; 1 pm; Free.

Joy Kelley will share tales of the civil rights movement along with her personal connection to this great historical figure.

FRI, JAN. 24

IN QUEENS

Alex Blake Quartet: Flushing Town Hall, 137-35 Northern Blvd.; (718) 463-7700; www.flushingtownhall.org; 8 pm; \$15, \$10 members and students.

Alex Blake is a modern bass virtuoso recognized for his technical and stylistic mastery of the classical upright (double) bass and the electric bass.

FURTHER AFIELD

Take Wing!: 4:30 pm. American Museum of Natural History. See Friday, Jan. 10.

SAT, JAN. 25

IN QUEENS

Natural Facials: Alley Pond Environmental Center, 228-06 Northern Blvd.; (718) 229-4000; 10:30 am; \$24.

Children will combine natural products such as cucumbers, honey, mint, crushed almonds, and egg whites to cleanse and soften their skin. Snacks and materials are provided.

Saturday Science Lab: 11 am. Central Library. See Saturday, Jan. 18.

Anoko Nante Ensemble: Central

Our online calendar is updated daily at www.NYParenting.com/calendar

Library, 89-11 Merrick Blvd.; (718) 990-0700; www.queenslibrary.org; 3 pm; Free.

This Queens-based Pan African percussion and vocal ensemble presents music from the continent of Africa.

SUN, JAN. 26

IN QUEENS

Astronomy: Fort Totten Visitor's Center, Ordinance Road at Shore Road; (718) 352-1769; www.nycgov-parks.org; 6 pm; Free.

Urban Park Rangers lead the discussion about the science, history, and folklore of the universe.

MON, JAN. 27

IN QUEENS

Lunar New Year Celebration: Hillcrest Public Library, 187-05 Union Tpke. at 188th Street; (718) 454-2786; www.queenslibrary.org; 4:30 pm; Free.

Celebrate the Year of the Horse with refreshments and other fun activities for children ages 6-14.

FRI, JAN. 31

IN QUEENS

Year of the Horse Lunar New Year Celebration: Ridgewood Public Library, 20-12 Madison St. at Forest Avenue; (718) 821-4770; www.queenslibrary.org; 4 pm; Free.

Learn about Lunar New Year through activities, crafts and stories.

Young Joo Song Quartet: Flushing Town Hall, 137-35 Northern Blvd.; (718) 463-7700; www.flushingtown-hall.org; 8 pm; \$15, \$10 members and students.

Celebrate the Lunar New Year with Young Joo Song, one of Korea's leading jazz pianists who has recorded eight albums with major music labels.

LONG-RUNNING

IN QUEENS

Playground: New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111th St. at Avenue of Science; (718) 699-0005 X 353; www.nyscience.org; Weekdays, 10 am-5 pm, Saturdays and Sundays, 10 am-6 pm, Now - Tues, Dec. 31; \$4 per person plus museum admission.

Children explore, discovery and have fun in this outdoor playground with slides, seesaws and pits as well as fog machines. Each session lasts 45 minutes; weather permitting.

Space Junk 3D: New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111th St. at Avenue of Science; (718) 699-0005 X 353; www.nyscience.org; Tuesdays - Sun-

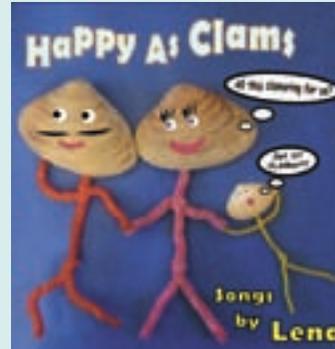
Seaside sing-a-long

Long Island's rich maritime history comes to life during "Saltwater Stories" weekend at the Long Island Children's Museum, with special performances by Lena and the Happy Clam Band.

Listen to stories from local baymen, boat builders, clambers and decoy carvers, and learn about their family traditions. Then enjoy "The Happy Clam Show," starring Lena and the Happy Clam Band, which combines music and activities for children ages 3 and up.

Jan. 11 and 12 at 2 pm. \$5 plus museum admission.

Long Island Children's Museum



[11 Davis Ave., off of Charles Lindbergh Boulevard, in Garden City, (516) 224-5800, www.licm.org/EventRegistration.php].

days, 10 am-5 pm, Now - Tues, Dec. 31; \$6 (\$5 children) plus museum admission.

Children experience collisions, soar 22,000 miles above the earth and explore the challenges faced in protecting our planet, without ever leaving Queens.

Flight of the Butterflies in 3D: New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111th St. at Avenue of Science; (718) 699-0005 X 353; www.nyscience.org; Tuesdays - Fridays, 11 am, Noon & 2 pm, Saturdays and Sundays, Noon, 1, 2 & 3 pm, Now - Fri, April 11, 2014; \$6 (adults,) \$5 (children, students and seniors,) plus NYSCI admission.

Join millions of real butterflies on an amazing journey to a remote and secret hideaway in this award-winning film.

Holiday Puppet Party Workshop: Museum of the Moving Image, 36-01 35th Ave.; (718) 777-6888; www.movingimage.us; Tuesday, Dec. 31, 1:15 pm; \$10.

Using simple materials, children will design their own unique characters, and then take turns performing with them in a short televised puppet show.

Canned Goods Drive: Hillcrest Public Library, 187-05 Union Tpke. at 188th Street; (718) 454-2786; www.queenslibrary.org; Weekdays, 2-6 pm, Now - Mon, Jan. 6, 2014; Free.

The library will collect unexpired cans and boxes of nonperishable food to distribute to neighbors in need.

Rehearsals and auditions: Queen of Angels Church, 4404 Skillman Ave. at 45th Street; (917) 548-1086; unitystagecompany@gmail.com.

www.unitystage.org; Thursdays, 4-5:30 pm, Now - Fri, March 7, 2014; call for prices.

Unity Stage is offering children in grades kindergarten through sixth to take part in a production of "Oklahoma." The public performance is in March. Registration required.

Celebrate with Crafts!: Pomonok Public Library, 158-21 Jewel Ave. at Parsons Boulevard; (718) 591-4343; www.queenslibrary.org; Thursdays, Jan. 2, 4:30 pm; Friday, Jan. 3, 4:30 pm; Free.

Kids and teens are invited to make crafts that celebrate the season and can be made for holidays.

Project Fashion Mavens: Central Library, 89-11 Merrick Blvd.; (718) 990-0700; www.queenslibrary.org; Thursday, Jan. 2, 4:30 pm; Thursday, Jan. 9, 4:30 pm; Thursday, Jan. 16, 4:30 pm; Thursday, Jan. 23, 4:30 pm; Thursday, Jan. 30, 4:30 pm; Thursday, Feb. 6, 4:30 pm; Thursday, Feb. 13, 4:30 pm; Thursday, Feb. 20, 4:30 pm; Thursday, Feb. 27, 4:30 pm; Free.

Teens ages 13-18 who are interested in fashion, and would like to work in the fashion marketing industry will enjoy this workshop.

Rehearsals and auditions: St. Mark's Church, 33-50 82nd St. and 34th Avenue; (917) 548-1086; unitystagecompany@gmail.com; www.unitystage.org; Fridays, 5-6:30 pm, Now - Sat, March 8, 2014; call for prices.

Unity Stage is offering children in grades Kindergarten through sixth to take part in a production of "Oklahoma." The public performance is in March. Registration required.

FURTHER AFIELD

Train show: Grand Central Station, 87 E. 42nd St., Manhattan; (718) 694-1600; Mondays - Thursdays, 8 am-8 pm, Fridays, 8 am-8 pm, Saturdays and Sundays, 10 am-6 pm, Now - Sun, Feb. 23, 2014; Free.

The annual show features Lionel's new limited-edition model of Grand Central Terminal as well as illustrations from Next Stop Grand Central.

31st Annual Wreath Interpretations: Arsenal in Central Park, 830 Fifth Ave. at E. 64th Street, Manhattan; (212) 360-8163; www.nycgov-parks.org/events/2014/01/01/wreath-interpretations; Weekdays, 9 am-5 pm, Now - Thurs, Jan. 9, 2014; Free.

This exhibition features wreaths made of unconventional items, through the eyes of 46 different artists.

Broken? Fix It!: Long Island Children's Museum, 11 Davis Ave. at West Road, Long Island; (516) 224-5800; www.licm.org; Tuesdays - Sundays, 10 am-5 pm, Now - Sun, Jan. 5, 2014; Free with museum admission.

How do you fix it? It's easy! Visitors enter the family repair shop and try their hand at a variety of fix-it activities.

Holiday train show: New York Botanical Garden, 200th Street and Kazimiroff Boulevard, The Bronx; (718) 817-8700; www.nybg.org; Tuesdays - Sundays, 10 am-6 pm, Now - Sun, Jan. 12, 2014; \$20 (\$8 children).

Large-scale model trains cover a wide variety of ground and features favorites including the Statue of Liberty, Rockefeller Center, the Brooklyn Bridge, and many others.

The Butterfly Conservatory: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, Manhattan; (212) 769-5200; www.amnh.org; Daily, 10 am-5:45 pm; \$27, \$16 (children).

This annual favorite features up to 500 live, free-flying tropical butterflies from Central, South, and North America, Africa, and Asia.

Origami Holiday Tree: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, Manhattan; (212) 769-5200; www.amnh.org; Daily, 10 am-5:45 pm; Now - Sun, Jan. 12, 2014; Free with museum admission.

An annual museum tradition, the Origami Holiday Tree and two 19-foot Holiday Barosaurs welcome visitors to the museum throughout the holiday season, inspired by the new exhibition The Power of Poison.

"Album Tracks: Subway Record Covers": New York Transit Museum,

Continued on page 32

Calendar

Our online calendar is updated daily at www.NYParenting.com/calendar

Continued from page 31

Boerum Place at Schermerhorn Street, Brooklyn; (718) 694-1600; www.mta.info/mta/museum; Tuesdays – Fridays, 10 am–4 pm, Saturdays and Sundays, 11 am–5 pm, Now – Sun, Jan. 12, 2014; \$7 (\$5 children and seniors).

Exhibition celebrates album artwork that features the New York City subway and elevated system.

Frogs — A Chorus of Colors: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, Manhattan; (212) 769-5200; awang@amnh.org; www.amnh.org; Daily, 10 am–5:45 pm; Now – Sun, Jan. 5, 2014; Suggested admission \$19, \$10.50 children, \$14.50 seniors and students.

See more than 150 live frogs, in-

cluding 10 species of colorful dart-poisoned frogs. Learn about their importance to ecosystems and the threats they face in the wild.

“The Owl and the Pussycat”: Vanderbilt Carriage House Theater, 180 Little Neck Rd., Long Island; (516) 293-0674; www.arenaplayers.com; Fridays and Saturdays, 8 pm, Sundays, 3 pm, Now – Sun, Jan. 19, 2014; \$20 (Friday and Sunday performances), \$25 (Saturday performances).

The Arena Players Repertory Theater will present the Bill Manhoff comedy “The Owl and the Pussycat.”

Arty facts: Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Pkwy. at Washington Avenue, Brooklyn; (718) 638-5000; www.brooklynmuseum.org; Sundays, 11

am and 1:30 pm, Sun, Jan. 5 – Sun, March 30, 2014; \$10 materials fee plus museum admission.

Children 4 to 7 years old explore the galleries, enjoy an activity, and take an art class.

Beginner Hockey Clinic: Lasker Pool and Rink, 110 Malcolm X Blvd., Central Park, Manhattan; (212) 348-4867; www.nycgovparks.org/events/2014/01/06/beginner-hockey-clinic; Mondays, 4 pm, Mon, Jan. 6 – Mon, March 10, 2014; Free.

Children ages 6–9 can practice skating and puck control drills as well as scrimmage play.

After School Ice Skating: Lasker Pool and Rink, 110 Malcolm X Blvd., Central Park, Manhattan; (212) 348-4867; www.nycgovparks.org

events/2014/01/08/after-school-ice-skating; Wednesdays and Fridays, 4 pm, Wed, Jan. 8 – Fri, March 14, 2014; Free.

Children ages 5–7 learn the basic elements of ice skating through group and individual instruction.

“Bessie’s Big Shot”: Swedish Cottage Marionette Theater, 79th Street and West Drive, Manhattan; (212) 988-9093; Tuesdays – Fridays, 10:30 am & Noon, Saturdays and Sundays, 1 pm, beginning Tues, Jan. 14; \$10, \$7 (children under 12).

It’s a bird, it’s a plane, no — it’s Bessie the cow! Based on the PuppetMobile show of the same name, this popular production is making its debut at the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre.

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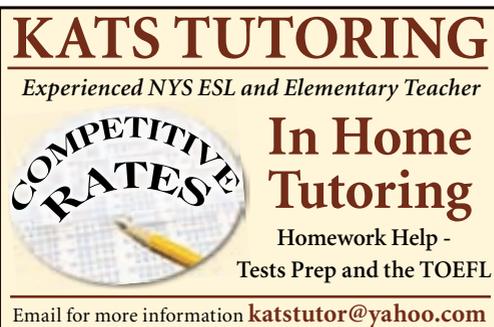
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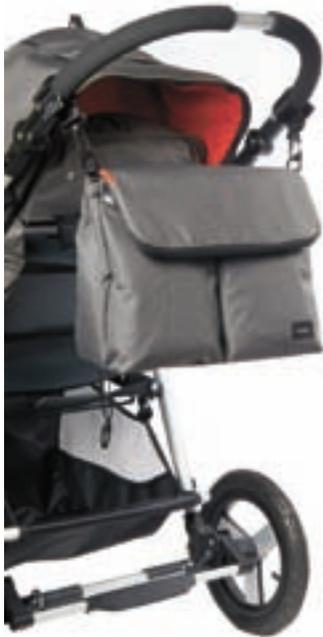
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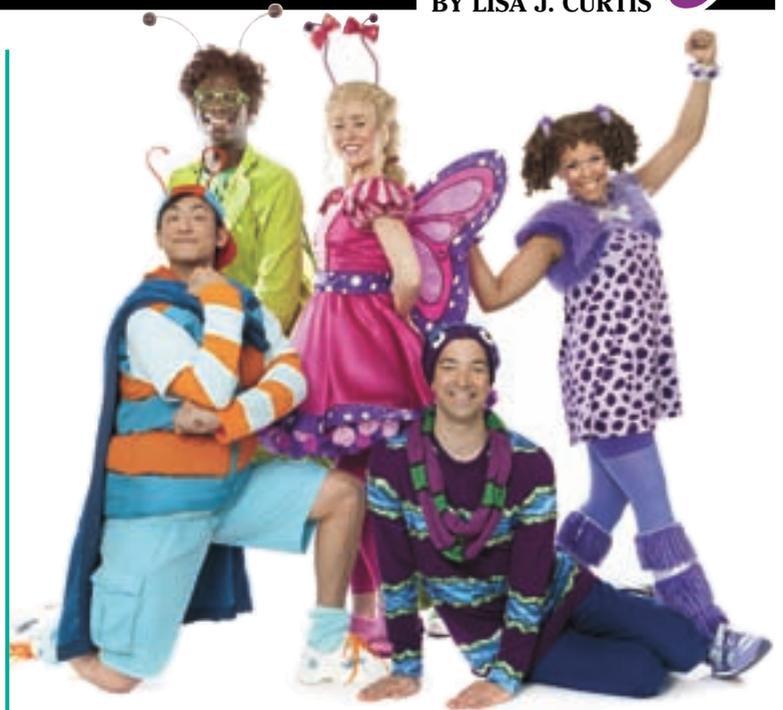
It's in the bag

Looking for a versatile diaper bag that holds all of baby's needs and still lets you look cool? Bumbleride's new messenger-style bag does both, with exterior diaper pockets boasting quick-release magnetic closures and another handy pocket for the coordinating, cushioned changing pad. It has a large, zippered compartment in the flap perfect for stowing a back-up outfit, and interior, elasticized pockets for bottles.

The wide shoulder strap can be slippery, but the bag also has stroller hooks with Velcro closures, so you can give your shoulder a rest while you take baby for a spin.

This sleek bag is available in seven colors in a polyester made from recycled water bottles and bamboo charcoal fiber.

Bumbleride Diaper Bag, \$59, www.franklin-goose.com.



Get moving indoors

In the bleak, sunshine-bereft, post-holiday daze of Janu-weary, you and your child may need a little extra oomph to get up and get moving, and The Ohmies' new CD, "Morning Wish Garden," provides just such sunny motivation for kids ages 2 to 8. With instructions on how to "Butterfly Fly," "Grasshopper Hop," or brush off their worries with the "Shake 'Em off Shuffle," the cast members of the New York City musical get kids

grooving. There are a world of musical influences to enjoy in this eclectic mix of songs. Whether it's the Spanish-flavored "Come Slither With Us" or the percussion-rich "Wag Your Tail," your little couch potato won't be able to resist the charms of Baily Butterfly, Carlin Caterpillar, and friends. Oh me, oh my, fun with the Ohmies sure feels good.

"Morning Wish Garden" CD by The Ohmies, \$12, www.theohmies.com.

Bottom's up!

Why hasn't someone thought of this sooner? Bouche Baby's Take N' Shake bottle has an attached formula container that makes it easier than ever to feed baby on the go. When mealtime arrives, unscrew the formula compartment, flip it over, and screw it back on, which allows for the powdered formula to slip through the sieve and mix with the water in the second compartment.



Then, as the name implies, just shake and serve.

Baby will enjoy the bottle's colorful design while he's slurping away on the "colic prevention nipple" made from soft, medical-grade silicone.

Later, the bottle can transform into a sippy cup with the purchase of a conversion kit that includes a handle and mouth piece to replace the nipple. We'll drink to that!

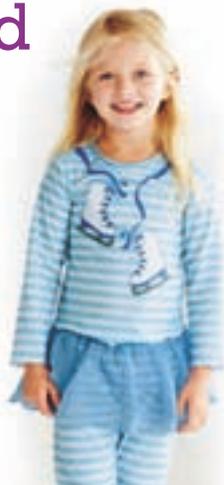
5-Ounce Bouche Baby Take N' Shake with Integrated Feeding Compartment, \$17.99, www.bouchebaby.com.

Off the ice, into bed

They'll forget to protest and triple-axe right into bed with Sara's Prints new figure-skating-themed Tutu Flannel Pajamas. Sweet dreams are made of these blue-and-white-striped cotton jammies with a fluttering blue tutu sewn into the waistband. A graphic of ice skates is screen-printed onto the top.

Thrilling ruffles adorn the cuffs of the top while oversized ruffles draw attention to your little skater's fancy footwork as they glide away to brush their teeth. We recommend tucking your little Dorothy Hamill into bed with a reading of "Olivia and the Ice Show" by Tina Gallo, to be followed by dreams of Olympic gold.

Sara's Prints Tutu Flannel Pajamas, \$38, www.garnethill.com.

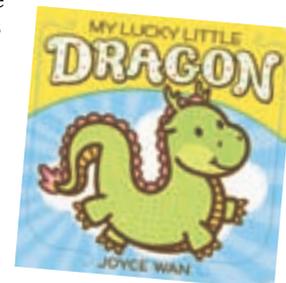


Animal attraction

Looking for a fun way to celebrate baby's first Chinese New Year? Ring in the holiday, which falls on Jan. 31 in 2014, by reading Joyce Wan's latest board book, "My Lucky Little Dragon," to your little fortune cookie. Her book features all of the zodiac animals, such as the "silly little monkey" and "chatty little rooster," on pages filled with bold illustrations, color, and words in

a wonderful variety of fonts. The cover is fun to touch, with its combination of smooth and rough, sparkly textures. "My Lucky Little Dragon" has a happy ending, too, proclaiming, "Baby, I'm lucky to have you" alongside a heart-shaped mirror, so your little reader can see what all the fuss is about.

My Lucky Little Dragon book by Joyce Wan, \$6.99, www.scholastic.com.



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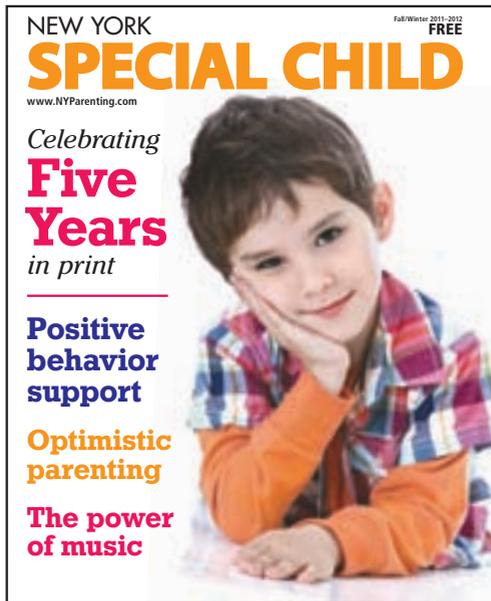
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