

Family Living

The Portland Observer

Winter Brings Child Care Challenges

Like thousands of working parents throughout, Ed Watson and his wife Liz have a precarious game plan for child care during the week.

Liz, a police attorney, drops off Andrew, 3, at a child-care center at 7:45 a.m. on her way to work. Ed, a bank vice president, drops off Sarah, 6, at school at 8:15 a.m. on his way to work.

Sarah finishes school at 3 p.m. and goes to an after-school enrichment program until Liz, who works an early flex-time schedule, gets off work at 4:30 p.m. and picks up both kids.

The routine relies heavily on everything falling into a predictable pattern — both parents working regular hours, both children being healthy and the schools staying open.

But bring on a winter storm, an out-of-town work assignment or the flu and the Watsons' careful routine is as useless as a four-wheel drive on

glare ice.

With the number of double-income families like the Watsons on the increase, employers are feeling the pressure to offer more flexible child-care options in case of weather emergencies, sudden illnesses or school holidays not observed by employers.

A growing number of employers have responded by offering back-up on-site care or allowing parents to work at home when their child-care plans fall through.

While most don't encourage it, some employers contacted last week said they allow workers to bring in school-age children when emergency care can't be found.

Of course, a good number of employers don't or can't offer back-up care.

Diane Curry who has children ages 5, 6, 7, and 8, asked her mother to

watch the brood for part of the day. Her brother usually watches the children when she and her husband Charlie, who also works, cannot — such as after school.

Curry said she's fortunate her bosses work out a suitable work schedule with her when she's in a child-care jam. For example, when school started last September Curry had no after-school care in place. So she worked 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., picked up the children, went home to cook dinner and clean the house, then picked up her husband in the late afternoon.

"We work for real good people," Curry said. "They told me it was all right, as long as Charlie was here." After she was able to get her brother to watch the kids, Curry began working 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in December.

Workers at small companies and

those in blue collar industries typically have no choice but to lose a day's pay and stay home with their children.

Some office workers are expected to find alternative child care in cases of emergencies rather than bring the children in.

Ed Watson said he and Liz trade off taking vacation days in child-care emergencies. Like many working parents, the Watsons have no extended family in the area who can care for the children.

"If one of us is not working out of town, then we'll stay home to take care of the kids," Watson said.

Sometimes the juggling of responsibilities requires tag team-like skill.

In many cases, bad weather is preferable to being under the weather. Many businesses also close down during snow storms, so parents also can take the day off.

Image Consultant To Visit Nordstrom's



Darlene Mathis

Nordstrom Lloyd Center has announced its plans to host image consultant Darlene Mathis on Thursday, Feb. 15.

Mathis is the author of Women of Color, the Multicultural Guide to Fashion and Beauty. She was recently profiled in Essence magazine and is the founder and president of Monday Mornings Hair Design, Inc., a full-service salon in Washington, D.C.

Mathis will be available to meet with store customers from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the cosmetics section on level two. To make an appointment or for special accommodations information, call the store at 287-2444, extension 1416.

Brights Shine Brighter At Area Schools

It's not every day that changing some light fixtures earns a check for \$150,000 for an energy-conscious consumer.

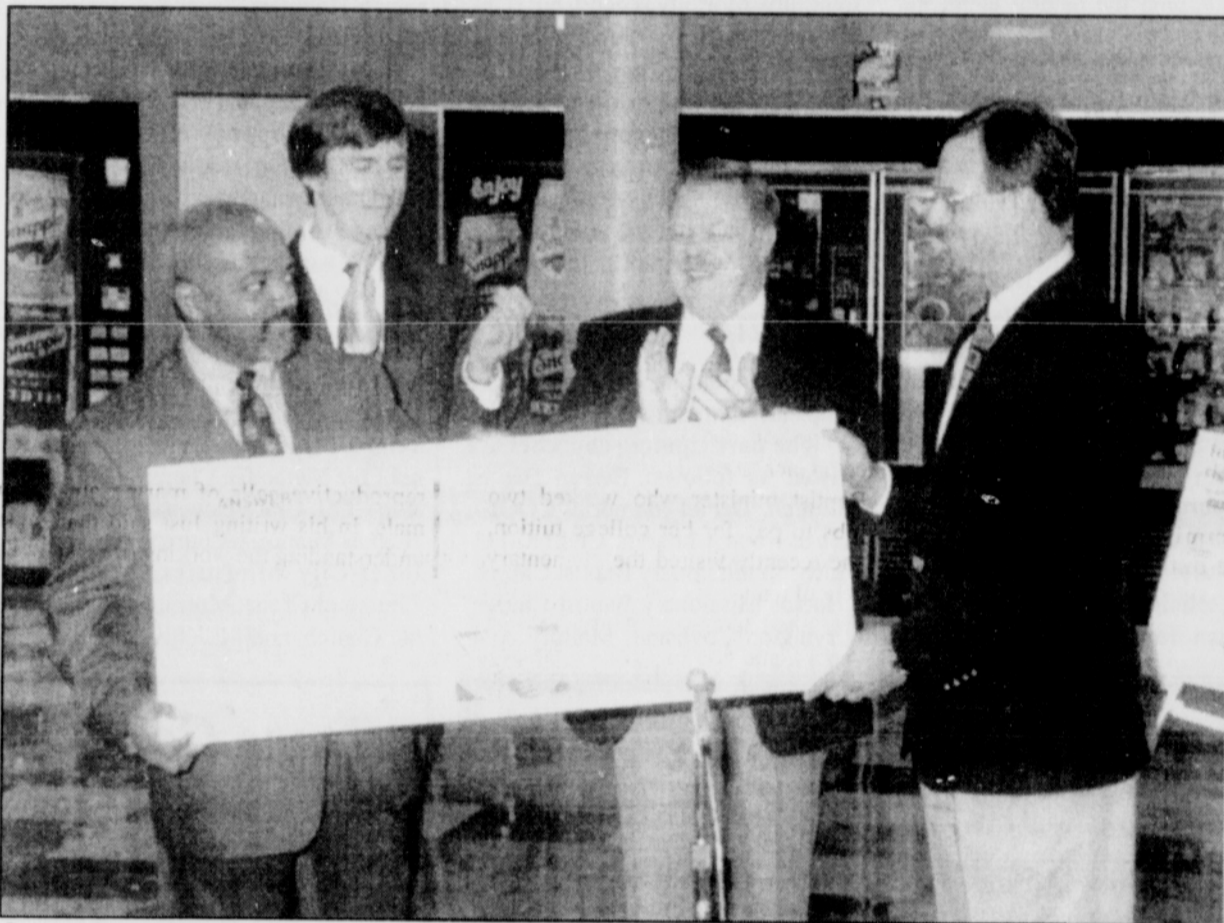
But as electricians recently twisted in the last fluorescent lights in the Jefferson High School cafeteria, Portland School Board member Marty Howard accepted a check for the school district's general fund in an innovative partnership with PacificCorp.

"Lighting improvements at Jefferson and 28 other schools in the district will save Portland public schools more than 4 million kilowatt hours of electricity each year," said Mira Vowles, energy engineer for the school district.

Combined with regular maintenance costs in the longer-lasting bulbs, the school district will save more than \$200,000 each year through lighting efficiency measures.

Environmentally friendly lighting brightens more than the hallways, classrooms and cafeteria at Jefferson.

"It could be pretty gloomy around here sometimes," said Jefferson Principal Alcena Boozer. "Better lighting also means an improvement in the student learning environment."



School Board President Luscious Hicks (left), accepts a check from Larry Blaufus of Pacific Power, during a ceremony at Jefferson High School. Also pictured are school board member Marty Howard (from left) and deputy school superintendent Donald McElroy. The district earned \$150,236 from Pacific Power in an incentive program to replace old lights with energy efficient ones.

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