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New moms stand together

Evil eye frustrates women nursing babies in public

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

One by one, they arrived, each with a babe in their arms.

The new moms hugged each other and lifted blankets to peek at each other's infants. Pale purple circles rimmed some of the moms' eyes, evidence of too many nighttime feedings and too much nocturnal rocking-chair time. They set down bulky diaper bags filled with everything from pacifiers and sunscreen to hand sanitizer, toys and changing pads.

The women relaxed into a group sigh. They look forward to the weekly baring of souls and the exchange of information during St. Anthony Hospital's Mom & Baby Support Group. The women share the joys of motherhood, but also talk in this non-judgmental oasis about their frustrations — sleep deprivation, colic, diaper rash, breast feeding issues, postpartum depression and lack of time to do anything some days other than to keep their babies fed and clean. The all-consuming nature of motherhood takes many by surprise.

"There are days where I literally get nothing done. The house is messy. The dinner is uncooked," said Jennifer Thompson, as she cuddled her son, Ethan.

They admit the idea of spotless homes, constantly cooing babies and a full night's sleep is the stuff of fantasy. They agreed, however, their babies are absolutely worth the effort.

"I love this kid uncontrollably," Thompson said of Ethan.

"She's my whole world," said Alyssa Bert of her tiny daughter, Catherine. "She's my life."

Registered nurse and lactation specialist Elizabeth Michael leads the group. Michael, with her aura of easy calm, is one of those people who can lower your blood pressure by simply being in the same room as you.

At meetings, each mom sets her baby on the scale and Michael records weights. Each mom checks in with the nurse about specific concerns and occasionally Michael guides a mom behind a partition to do an impromptu examination. The rest of the two-hour session is unstructured. They hang out with their babies. They talk.

The conversation roams to and fro, but one subject pops up at almost every meeting, Michael said — breastfeeding in public and getting the evil eye.

"They sometimes get stressed out and go and sit on a toilet because it's private," Michael said. "It's still such a stigma. I don't know what we can do to change that mindset."

Breastfeeding is natural, she said, but some in the public see it as sexual. Some of the moms do breast pumping and put the milk in bottles to bring when they venture out as a way to avoid conflict. Others forge ahead with breastfeeding. She said some of the mothers simply put on their best "don't mess with me" expression and proceed.

On Friday at the Pendleton Farmers Market, for the first time, nursing mothers found a special tent for



Carly Smith lifts son Mason from a scale during a meeting of the new mom support group at St. Anthony Hospital.

nursing babies. The East Umatilla County Breastfeeding Coalition sponsored the tent.

"The tent has three walls, chairs, pillows, a table and a big rug," Michael said. "A nursing mom can sit down and feed her baby, get a drink of water and be out of the heat."

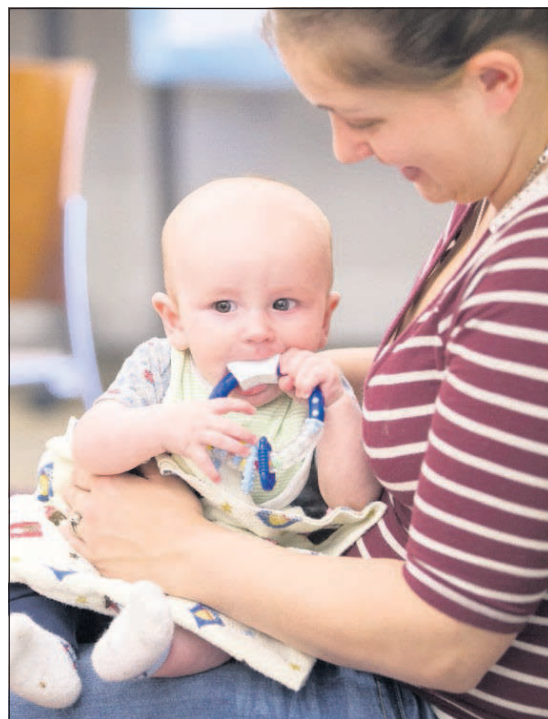
The coalition also will offer stickers with a simple line drawing of a mom nursing her baby and the words "Eat Local."

Oregon, along with Washington, actually embraces breastfeeding more than any other states. In a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention survey, the two states shared an almost 94 percent rate of mothers who breastfeed initially, though the percentages drop to the low sixties after six months for both. Mississippi has the lowest rate with 58 percent initially and 26 percent after six months. Michael said Umatilla County has an initiation rate of 87 percent.

Being that it is World Breastfeeding Week, Michael extolled the benefits of breastfeeding with added resolve. Breastfeeding, she said, protects against childhood leukemia, diarrhea, colds, ear infections and allergies and lowers the risk of later obesity, diabetes and heart disease. Studies even suggest that breastfeeding leads to increased intelligence and higher earnings.

Breastfeeding also benefits the mother, she said, by improving her sleep and reducing the chance of postpartum depression.

"Eighty percent of new moms have some form of postpartum depression from mild depression to full-blown psychosis," Michael said. "It's not talked about



Jennifer Thompson snuggles with her son Ethan during early weeks of the new moms support group at St. Anthony Hospital.

"There are days where I literally get nothing done. The house is messy. The dinner is uncooked. Other days, chores are done and dinner is on the table."

— Jennifer Thompson

very much."

In addition, she said, breastfeeding is free and leaves no carbon footprint since it has no packaging.

The World Health Organization recommends solely feeding a baby breast milk for at least six months to give babies a good start.

Part of Michael's job is advising women who are having trouble getting the breastfeeding process started. She said such

things as pain, low milk supply and baby's reluctance to suck can be overcome with certain techniques and positioning.

That said, not every mom in the support group breastfeeds.

"Some moms come who are not breastfeeding and that's okay," she said. "This group is about peer support and bumping shoulders with other new moms who are going through the same things right now."

The support group meets every Friday from 9-11 a.m. at St. Anthony Hospital. Pregnant women, dads and other support people are welcome.

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or call 541-966-0810.



Ellie Mae Wortman plays in the midst of the mom/baby support group at St. Anthony Hospital.

OUT OF THE VAULT

Jailed 'Houdini' won't test skills on Umatilla County Jail cell

His greatest wish was to escape from the water chamber that ended Harry Houdini's life. His signature feat was wriggling out of a straitjacket and chains while dangling by his feet from a rope hung over busy city streets. But Sam Ross wisely decided to put his skills on hold while on ice at the Umatilla County Jail in August of 1980.

Ross, a 25-year-old escape artist, traveled with a portfolio of newspaper clipping detailing his daring escapes in places like Richmond, Va., Atlantic City, N.J., Dallas, Phoenix, San Diego and more. He began experimenting with escapes at the age of 15, and wriggled out of his first straitjacket two years later in Boston. After three years in the Navy, Ross began a swing through the country in 1978 and 1979, startling passersby with his death-defying stunts. Newspapers were always given a heads-up before the

performance, though he was foiled from an escape try on Hoover Dam when a story was published in advance and the Bureau of Reclamation put the kibosh on his plans.

"People think it's crazy for some reason," said Ross. "I don't know why; it's normal to me."

But normal took a back seat after Ross was introduced to heroin in San Diego in 1979. A life of crime followed to support a \$100-a-day habit, including petty thefts in Las Vegas and Reno, then felony thefts of silverware, guns and a car from a home north of Pendleton. Ross turned himself in to San Diego police after ditching the car and fencing the stolen goods. He was returned to Pendleton and sequestered in the Umatilla County Jail's maximum security section — with an extra heavy chain and padlock added to his door for good measure.

"When he listed his occupation, he said

'escape artist,'" sheriff's Sgt. Tom Campbell said. "So naturally we put him back there. What else do you do with an escape artist?"

Ross was eventually moved to a lower security part of the jail with other prisoners. So did he try to escape? "I'm just gonna do my time and get it over with. ... Try and get myself straightened out," Ross said. His post-jail plans included a Halloween stunt to commemorate the 54th anniversary of the death of Harry Houdini, where he would be outfitted in a straitjacket, 50 pounds of chains, arm and leg shackles, and hung by a rope 30 feet over swords. The rope would then be set alight, giving him about 60 seconds to make his escape.

Renee Struthers is the Community Records Editor for the East Oregonian. See the complete collection of Out of the Vault columns at eovault.blogspot.com

ODDS & ENDS

Bar blocks cell signal, tries to get patrons talking

LONDON (AP) — A new English cocktail bar offers something truly old-fashioned on its menu: the chance to talk to real people instead of staring down your cell phone.

The Gin Tub in Brighton has won rave reviews in its first week of business by installing a cell signal blocker and placing throwback rotary phones at its tables. They can be used to dial patrons at neighboring tables or the bar for another round.

The Gin Tub is reckoned to be the only British pub blocking cell phones by using a Faraday shield built into its ceiling, an exception in Britain's 2006 Wireless Telegraphy Act that otherwise outlaws the use of signal blockers.

Proprietor Steve Tyler says: "Mobile phones have killed pubs. When you go out socially, you don't need social media."