

# Nurturing the Nurturers

Association educates, offers social support for in-home day care providers

By Ellen Williams-Masson

When Nancy Kibbe left a career in corporate sales to open her own child care business six years ago, she sought advice from other providers before taking the leap.

"I had done family child care when my son was little – that was 21 years ago – and then I went back to my corporate career after he started kindergarten. Kibbe said. "I always loved doing family child care, but one of the issues for me was could I afford to do it. I really didn't want to go back to poverty again."

Kibbe found the financial information and encouragement she was seeking through the Verona Family Child Care Association (VFCCA), a community resource for in-home providers that offers training, mentoring and support for child care professionals. She was pleased to discover that child care rates have increased quite a bit over the years.

"I think it's critical for new providers to have people to talk to, to ask questions and get advice," Kibbe said. "(Child care) is a field where you are the only adult, usually, in your business, so it's great to have the camaraderie and friendship that develops by having friends that are in the same profession that you are in."

With a stated mission of "nurturing the nurturers," the VFCCA is a professional organization that was formed in 1990 to serve family child care providers in Verona and surrounding communities. The association emphasizes education through monthly training sessions and training scholarships to offset the costs of attending classes, workshops and conferences. Matching funds for retirement or health insurance benefits are also available, and members are listed online at [www.vfcca.net](http://www.vfcca.net) and in the VFCCA's published Parents' Guide to Child Care.

VFCCA member Karen Matzke said that the opportunity to socialize – and commiserate - with colleagues who understand the joys and tribulations of caring for other people's children is another benefit of joining the group.

"The social aspect (of the meetings) brings up things that people are either delighted with that they share, or they may have a situation where they'd like help and encouragement from other folks," Matzke said. "It's a place you can go and not be judged by your peers, but yet be encouraged, supported and problem solve."

Matzke gets fresh ideas and inspiration for her Fitchburg day care center while visiting other homes during the meetings which she said can help "pull you all back together again" after an exhausting and challenging day. Sometimes all it takes is a sympathetic ear to work through a sticky situation.

"You are in the same spot that everybody else has been in," Matzke said. "You don't want to complain to parents because you love what you are doing – we really all do love what we are doing – but there are those moments. . . when you need to be able to work it out with somebody else. Then you have that nucleus of people that you have a phone number for, and you can call them and say, 'What would you do if . . .'"

Mutual support is a key tenet of the tightly knit organization, and Sue Rowe said that one of their most important roles is "helping or mentoring new providers through the regulation process." Rowe has served as VFCCA chair since 1998 and has been a family child care provider for 22 years.

“We really do emphasize the importance of regulation, even though in Wisconsin it is legal to do child care and not be regulated as long as you have three or fewer children,” Rowe said.

“Taking care of a group of children requires more than the skills learned taking care of just your own children, not that that isn’t a very hard job – it is – but there are other things, too, you have to consider.”

A family day care center, by definition, is a business that offers care to a maximum of eight children at a time, and a state license is required when caring for 4 to 8 children. Additional certification and/or accreditation may be sought at the city, county, or national level for family day care centers of any size if appropriate requirements are met.

Although the VFCCA is open to all family child care providers, only regulated centers are listed in the association’s guide or website. Fitchburg providers Mary Ellen Tremelling said that regulation offers protection by establishing safety and health standards as well as requiring ongoing education to “keep current on all laws and regulations.”

“Licensers are really there to help us and see that we are doing things right,” she said. Tremelling has been a child care provider for 29 years and works in partnership with her husband, Richard, in their infant/toddler program.

Continuing education is also good business strategy because better interpersonal skills help shield providers from wear and tear in the day-to-day interactions with families, and being part of a professional organization like VFCCA makes learning more fun.

“Education helps so much, because when you understand your kids, you are going to be a better provider. . . And you are going to have more longevity,” Tremelling said. “You need to take care of yourself to be able to take care of other people’s kids.”

Six years after she jumped from the corporate world to the playroom, Verona provider Nancy Kibbe credits the Verona Family Child Care Association with helping her “become much more professional and provide better care.”

“It’s ongoing education, it’s support and it’s friendship,” Kibbe said. “It really enriches your experiences as a child care provider.”

For more information visit [www.vfcca.net](http://www.vfcca.net).

August 20, 2009 THE VERONA PRESS

## **Volunteers Building Trail Activities at Tollefson Park**

*By Seth Jovaag*

*Unified Newspaper Group*

A walking path in Verona will get a new feature Tuesday designed to help toddlers and preschool kids develop skills they'll need in school.

On Aug. 25, volunteers will construct a "Born Learning Trail" in Tollefson Park near Glacier Edge Elementary School. The trail, one of the 14 being built around Dane County, aims to boost children's language and problem-solving skills while encouraging families to get active, said Kathy Hubbard, director of community impact for United Way of Dane County, which is spearheading the initiative.

The trail includes 10 activities, marked by colorful metal signs that encourage parents to talk to their children about shapes, colors and the environment and to develop skills kids need for kindergarten, Hubbard said.

For example, one sign suggests walkers listen for birds and consider, "What are they saying? Can you sing like them?" There will also be hopscotch squares, numbers to count and letters painted in bold colors on the path.

The trail should help parents or caregivers "truly engage with a young child," Hubbard said.

"These signs offer suggestions that maybe you hadn't thought of," she said.

Sue Rowe, chairperson of the Verona Family Childcare Association, said many local childcare providers use the city's parks and applaud the new initiative.

"It's a very nice concept," she said. "It is a way for children to combine physical activity with cognitive learning."

Costs for Verona's trail are covered by a \$2,000 donation from Cleary Building Corporation which will also provide volunteers Tuesday afternoon to dig postholes, mount signs and paint stencils. The city's Parks department will chip in by using augers and skid loaders to do some of the work.

The workday coincides with United Way's "Days of Caring" campaign on Aug. 25-26 and 28, when volunteers across the country donate time to numerous projects.

In Verona, there will be a special appearance by the Oscar Meyer Weinermobile, and Hubbard added that signs written in Spanish will be added to the Tollefson Park trail later this fall.

Hubbard commended Verona school officials for being among the first to coordinate the project.

"They led the way on this, and I think Verona deserves kudos for that," she said.