

MOMS REACH OUT TO EACH OTHER

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by Dale Sprouse

It proved easy for Sharon Beach and Terri Mauthe to strike up a friendship when they met by chance at a local Residence Inn in late 1993.

Newcomers to the Tri-Valley, they had much in common. Each was anxious to say goodbye to temp living and move her family into a new home. More significantly, the young mothers were beginning a new life in a community where their families had neither relatives nor a network of friends.

Beach thought the two needed a club like the one she'd belonged to in Texas—a place where mothers might find playmates for their infants and not-yet-ready-for-school toddlers, or where they could gather for emotional support and counsel when facing the frustrations of parenting, or to fashion a social safety-net.

Soon after, armed with flyers they'd put together, Beach and Mauthe made the rounds of Livermore to spread the word. The result: the Livermore Moms, today a more than three-year-old club that averaged 50 members until a recent spurt brought it near the 80-member mark.

"One of the biggest supports we are in for people from out of town, people who don't have an extended network or other friends or family nearby," says current club president Eileen Plantenga, who joined shortly after moving from Chicago two and a-half years ago.

"As far as my personal story, it has made a difference. My husband and I are both from the Midwest, so our family doesn't have Aunts and uncles or cousins or grand- parents in this area. This has been somewhat of a substitute."

"Me club, says Beach, also is a blessing for new mothers who have left the world of business to turn to full-time parenting. "Sometimes working women who don't go back to work after having a baby find they don't know anybody (in their community)," said Beach. "They feel completely isolated.

Our club is a good way to meet other people."

Monthly, the Livermore Moms meet at a member's home. Sometimes the occasion is a potluck salad social so members—especially new ones—can become better acquainted. Often the meetings feature an invited speaker, and the talk can turn to nutrition, health, discipline, toilet training, personal safety for women, or gardening.

The monthly gatherings currently attract 25-40 people to a host member's home. "We're outgrowing the home setting, and are looking for some public place or some business where we could meet for a minimal charge or, even better, for free," said Mauthe, currently the group's treasurer.

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The club also plans special events for couples. And there are also family get togethers, such as parties for Easter, Halloween and Christmas, and for other special occasions.

About 20 club members have fashioned their own babysitting co-op, calling each other when they need a sitter—, instead of exchanging money, they exchange hours. "That has helped me a lot," says Plantenga of the co-op. "One or both of my kids are at someone else's house playing, so you know they are safe and are with other kids having fun. It is different than paying a sitter to come to your house. I use it once a week, if not more."

The Livermore Moms also support a wide range of children-centered activities: play groups covering various age categories from infancy to age five, for example, and outings to parks and field trips, such as one to a local firehouse.

"Some people join for just one thing, all

they may want is a play group, or women to go out with," said Plantenga. "That is okay. We don't mind. People get involved to the level that they need or want."

Livermore Moms is not the only local organization offering support to area mothers. Also in the Valley are the Pleasanton Mother's Club, which has a current membership of some 270; the Amador Mother's Club, which has 187 members; and the Tri-Valley Mothers of Twins club, with about 90 members (see twins article).

Amador is an off-shoot of the Pleasanton club, which felt it had gotten too large several years ago when its membership had climbed to just over 200. Both clubs hold their monthly meetings in Pleasanton, and draw most of their members from the cities of Dublin, Pleasanton and Livermore.

Activities of the Amador and Pleasanton clubs are essentially the same as those of the Livermore Moms. Programs for children also are geared toward those five and under.

"Me Amador and Pleasanton clubs, unlike the Livermore Moms, however, are affiliated with a national organization of clubs for mothers, said Jill Rush, director of the Amador Mothers' Club and regional coordinator for Mothers' Clubs of the East Bay, which encompasses 10 separate clubs.

Mothers clubs, said Rush, were started nationally in the 1970s by Kathie Hoepke, an Army wife "who moved around a lot" and "was always looking for a way to meet people." Today Hoepke, who has published a book titled "Nurturing the Nurturer," leads seminars around the country to help others start clubs. A local club's seminar participation is required for national affiliation, said Rush.