

Child Care Crosses Cultural Divide

By Jennifer Wake



The Kolm family's au pair, Veronika Skotnicova, watches the four children while Christine volunteers at a Halloween Carnival booth at Campolindo on Oct. 27. Photo Jennifer Wake

As children get older, their schedules can become hectic, making choosing proper child care a daunting task. When Moraga resident and attorney Christine Kolm had her four children in an after-school program, she found herself scrambling to fit everything in.

"When you have little ones, I think it's good to have them in a day care setting where they can socialize in different environments and gain a stronger sense of self," she said. "But when the kids are older, they have homework that has to be done, soccer and different events to attend. I would get home between six and six-thirty and dinner, home-

work and baths had to be done within a two and a half hour period."

Kolm hired a nanny, but the cost ranged between \$35-45,000 per year. "The really good ones make more," she said.

With her four children ranging in age from kindergarten to middle school, Kolm found an economical alternative that was a better fit for her hectic family schedule: an au pair.

Typically, au pairs range in age from 18 to 26 and come from all over Europe, as well as some from China and Latin America, to live with a host family for an aver-

age of one year. In addition to providing childcare, many au pairs assist with light housekeeping, help with meals, and drive children to and from school and extracurricular activities.

Annual costs for an au pair range between \$15-18,000, not including room and board. San Francisco-based AuPairCare – just one of several au pair agencies in the country – has placed more than 30,000 au pairs from 40 countries with families across the United States. According to Julia Brewer, who is an area director for AuPairCare, the program has grown a lot in the past five years.

"It's seen as a good child care solution," she said. "And because English has become the language of business, learning English is a big motivation for the au pairs. English gives them a skill they can take back."

The program is considered an exchange program by the U.S. Department of State, although it's only a one-way exchange, and the rules regarding au pairs (including total hours per day and week they can work) are overseen by this agency.

"You're inviting someone who's from another culture into your home, which has its pluses

and minuses," said Kolm, who recently had an au pair from Poland live with her family for a year, and in August welcomed a new au pair from the Czech Republic. "With an au pair, your family experiences another culture and another language. With in home care, your home becomes the base for your family, rather than a day care facility. Unlike a day care facility, if a child is sick, an au pair can still help provide care. There are fewer bumps in the road. The flip side is that you are inviting a new person into your home to live with you. There are always adjustments that have to be made. But, if you have space in the home and space in your family, it can work."

The toughest part for the au pair, says Brewer, is making the cultural adjustment and fighting homesickness.

"We provide them with support and organize monthly events," said Brewer, who acts as an intermediary between the au pairs and their host families. "Most of them have never been to the United States. It's a huge adjustment."

Brewer says the biggest mistake families make is thinking their au pair will be like Mary Poppins.

"Families who are the most successful are the ones who treat an

au pair as a family member – like a niece or a best friend's daughter from another country," she said. "People with the most success realize they are not just an employee, and they're not professional nannies, either. They must have realistic expectations of what an au pair can provide."

Kolm agrees. "You have to be patient," she said. "They're dealing with culture shock and being away from people who speak their language and react the same as they do. It takes about three months, but they become part of your family."

Lamorinda Reads Finale a Great Success

By Sophie Braccini



Waiting for Steinbeck... Linda Waldroup and a group of Lamorinda readers Photo Sophie Braccini

The author of "Down to a Soundless Sea", Thomas Steinbeck, is a handsome 60-something fellow with a wonderful sense of humor. He delighted an audience of more than 120 Lamorindans who came to the Orinda Community Center last Thursday night for the grand finale of the Lamorinda Reads program. Six hundred copies of Steinbeck's book were read, circulated and discussed throughout Lamorinda.

The son of the great John Steinbeck professed a love of stories; true stories, false stories and tall tells as well. He affirmed that all the stories in "The Soundless Sea" were based on real stories. Responding to a question from the audience, Steinbeck explained that it can take him months to write a story, and that the most important part happens in his woodshop or

while fishing. "You need to day-dream your story," he said, "tell it to your self until it is as familiar to you as your grandmother's story, then you can sit down and write it." His last advice to the audience was to write themselves, "You all have short stories in you, you just have to let them out." Book signing was the final and traditional ending for the evening.

As she was interacting with guests, Moraga Librarian Linda Waldroup acknowledged that many of the books that had been distributed around town had not been returned to the libraries yet. "They might still be passed on from family members to neighbors," she said, "but I expect they will eventually find their way to our offices and we plan to give the extra copies to the Acalanes School District."

AUHSD Calendar: Time to Get Involved

By Sophie Braccini

On October 17th, the Acalanes Union High School District (AUHSD) unanimously voted to maintain the same academic calendar for the 2008-2009 school year and to appoint a committee to study the impact of alternative calendars for subsequent school years. The vote followed the Staff's recommendation, a 180 degree turn from the August meeting when Superintendent Jim Negri had asked for the adoption of a calendar that would have seen students start a week earlier in August and finish a week earlier in June. After years of negotiations and a period of public outrage, how did it happen that so much time and energy was spent, only to end up back at square one?

Most of the public debate started in August, when parent after parent protested the proposed changes to the calendar, which many felt were being imposed on them and their children. Richard Whitmore, President of the AUHSD Governing Board, offers an explanation: "To change the calendar requires a lot of collaboration, and that collaboration is made more complex by the bargaining aspect." The calendar is part of

the bargaining that takes place between the teachers' union and the District and these negotiations are not public. As a result, "For many parents, the issue was raised and then went away about two years ago, so people were surprised to see it on our agenda again," adds Whitmore.

Parents felt estranged from the process and unsure of its consequences. "Changing the school calendar affects families and other school districts. We are your customers, you need to conduct surveys and hear our concerns," said an outraged father of children registered in both the Acalanes and the Lafayette school districts. Flaws in the communication process were acknowledged across the board. Whitmore agrees: "I think the process we went through between June and August and this final vote have impressed on the Board and district staff the importance of constant communication as difficult issues evolve."

The proposed new calendar has not been permanently shelved. Parents will have an opportunity to get involved, in a dual process featuring informational forums in February and the formation of a Study Committee. The forums will include discussion of the rationale behind the recommendation and the consequences of its enactment. "Our objective is the best interest of the students," affirms the Superintendent, "and stress is high on our list of subjects to tackle."

... continued on page 11

for MEN Core Strength Stamina, Power Stress management	for WOMEN Toning, Flexibility Mind Control Weight management

DAHN YOGA

We have it all.

YOGA • TAI-CHI • MEDITATION • KIDS • HEALING
925-377-YOGA www.dahnyoga.com
452 Center St. Moraga, CA 94556

Custom Construction Lending

Go with the big national lender, from down the block

WaMu

Whatever your needs, we can help you find the right loan. WaMu combines financial stability and flexibility with personal local service. We have over 100 years experience.

We offer custom construction, purchase, refinance or equity lending. We work hard to get you the best pricing and the best loan to fit your needs. Go with experience, go with The Tim Floyd Team at WaMu.

Tim Floyd 925.256.4828 Office 925.348.4194 Direct

Washington Mutual programs, rates, and terms subject to change. Certain restrictions and conditions apply. Some programs may not be combined with others. Not all features are available on all products. You should always consider all associated costs when evaluating whether the loan provides you with a benefit in deciding to refinance.

3104 Ptarmigan Drive Unit 2, Rossmoor

Walk directly from your carport into your Santa Clara model with 1 step!!! Enjoy the quiet serenity in your beautiful 2 bedroom/ 2 bath end unit with a hillside view. The den provides flexibility for an office or additional sitting room.

- Updated kitchen with Corian counters and newer appliances
- Custom lighting in every room • Skylights provide added light in kitchen and bath
- New sliders to outside patio • Large windows provide abundant natural light
- Spacious storage area adjacent to the carport
- 1212 square feet

Offered at \$469,000

2601 Ptarmigan Drive Unit 2, Rossmoor

You will love the beautiful kitchen and spacious rooms in this wonderful Expanded Kentfield model. Enjoy the covered patio as you view the hills and trees below. The updated office or den provides you with a comfortable area to relax or work. The built in cabinets in the den as well as the kitchen provide you with added flexibility.

Offered at \$419,000

Marty Tuominen
J. Rockcliff Realtors
mtuominen@rockcliff.com

Direct: (925) 253-7032
Mobile: (925) 482-4204

89 Davis Rd., Suite 100 • Orinda

WWW.MARTYTUOMINEN.COM

Support Lamorinda Weekly by shopping with our advertisers and telling them you saw their ad! Your local free Newspaper for Lamorinda

Now in Walnut Creek

Jumpstart Your Weight Loss

Jumpstart Medicine offers a medically-supervised weight loss program individually designed for men and women looking to lose weight safely and quickly. On average, our patients lose 2 to 5 pounds per week over the course of 12 weeks. Most patients feel great, have no cravings, and stay highly motivated due to quick results which they can see and feel.

How much do you want to lose?

jumpstart
MEDICINE

Walnut Creek • San Ramon
925-277-1123 • www.jumpstartmedicine.com

A band aid on your knee, sealed with a kiss. Now it's your turn.

We can help with dependable and affordable in-home care for seniors. Services tailored to your needs.

- Bathing & grooming assistance
- Meal prep and clean up
- Laundry and linen changing
- Alzheimer's and dementia care
- Errands and transportation
- Up to 24-hour care

Licensed, insured and bonded

Proudly serving the Lamorinda Community

CALL US TODAY FOR YOUR FREE ASSESSMENT:

925-376-8000

www.SeniorHelpers.com

Senior Helpers
Caring In-Home Companions

Experience our top quality Aesthetic Services, performed by our new professional and knowledgeable Aesthetician, Monique.

Book an appointment by October 31st and you'll receive

10% OFF
your next facial or waxing service

shelbysexton
SALON

33 LAFAYETTE CIRCLE, LAFAYETTE (in La Fiesta Square) • 925.962.1900

www.shelbysextonsalon.com

FULL SERVICE SALON | CUSTOMIZED SKIN CARE & MAKE-UP | LUXURIOUS FACIALS
WAXING SERVICES | PLUS, HAIR CUT & COLOR SPECIALIST | EXCLUSIVE KERASTASE® TREATMENTS