



Looking for instruction

Parents of an estimated 166,000 children in California are awaiting an appellate court ruling on whether they have a constitutional right to home-school their children.

Please go to A-14



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Celebrate the good apples of child care

SKIATOOK — Miss Carrie broke up the biting cartel sweeping through the classroom of 2-year-olds a few years back.

She brings peace to playground squabbles and sharpens the minds and manners of Skiatook children.

April is the Month of the Young Child, sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

It's a time when child-care teachers remind the public of the jobs they do.

It's a chance for parents to thank them.

It's also an opportunity for policy-makers to review the supports for the child-care industry, working families and children.

Miss Carrie plans events to celebrate the month.

There are guest reading times, parent-child breakfasts, a balloon release, home safety reminders and musical performances.

More importantly, the time pulls parents into our children's worlds on their terms.

Knee-high art centers produce paintings for our refrigerators.

Songs about little bears and big bad wolves waft into hallways. Becoming Spider-Man or Cinderella for an hour is possible at the dress-up corner.

Children serve plastic meals in the diminutive kitchen. Each has a spot for nap time.

Children don't know they are learning. It's just a regular day.

The wild bunch: Stories about bad caregivers make Miss Carrie's staff members cringe. They get angry and sad just like the rest of us.

But it's unfair to castigate the more than 7,180 child-care workers in Oklahoma based on those few bad ones.

They keep the nearly 148,000 children in their care safe and prepare them for school.

Miss Carrie knows I check the inspection reports from the state Department of Human Services. Those are now online.

She's not offended. No good teacher or director would be.

Recently, she told me teachers cannot do this unless they truly enjoy children.

That's not a cliché. Children can be a tough bunch.

Tantrums, potty training, ear infections, bad moods and back talk all come with the early education territory.

There are rewards. Children learning to read. Laughing at playtime. Stories told from wild imaginations. Group hugs.

The average annual salary for a child-care worker in Oklahoma is \$15,440, according to the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies.

That changes some with geography and teacher education.

Money is obviously not the lure.

Greatest loss: Miss Carrie is leaving the center I have trusted with the most loved people in my life.

In the past four years, she completed training to become the director and improved the center's state quality rating.

With her encouragement, teachers get professional development and seek higher certifications.

As Miss Carrie leaves for another city, she is unsure about staying in the child-care field.

Certainly, more money can be made elsewhere with less stress.

While the center searches for another director, Miss Carrie's absence will be felt by children, parents and teachers.

But the greatest loss will be to the child-care industry.

Miss Carrie leaves the center in better shape than when she arrived.

If April is a reminder of anything, it is that more Miss Carries are needed in Oklahoma.

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OKLAHOMA FREEWHEEL: 30TH ANNIVERSARY

Bicyclists bring a boost



MICHAEL WYKE / Tulsa World file

Three bicyclists wave as they cross over Gaines Creek near McAlester during Oklahoma FreeWheel in 2005. This year will be the cross-state bicycle ride's 30th anniversary.

It is year's biggest event for many hosting towns

By JEFF BILLINGTON
World Staff Writer

It's been 30 years since FreeWheel first hit Oklahoma's rural pavement, and organizers are hoping this year's event will again be an economic boost for the towns taking part.

The journey begins June 8 in Marietta and ends June 14, about 423 miles away, in Caldwell, Kan. Scheduled stops are Sulphur, Seminole, Henryetta, Drumright, Perry and Tonkawa, before the riders roll into Kansas.

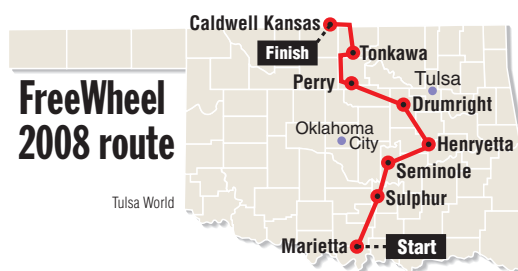
Organizers work with each town on the route to come up with festivities or places for riders to rest. For most of the towns, FreeWheel is the biggest event they have each year, FreeWheel's director, Ellen Proctor, said.

"We have many towns that request us to come because we're a huge economic boost to some of these little towns. We bring in 1,000 people on bicycles, and of course there will be families traveling along with us and all our support people. We probably come in with about 1,200 to 1,300 people to their town, and eat and fuel vehicles. They're going to spend money," Proctor said.

"We're trying to get people registered in advance to help these towns know what to get ready for."

Almost 900 bicyclists took part in last year's event, and organizers hope for about 1,000 this year.

"In the past we've had about 1,500, and then it kind of leveled off. The past few years, it had really declined. So I was thrilled last year that we



had almost 900," Proctor said. "We're a family ride, and we think 1,000 is a really good number for us to deal with. We feel safe with that, and it's just a nice number to have them spaced out along the highway."

Cyclists who can't take part in the full event can sign up for a half-week, a popular option last year, Proctor said.

"So many people can only show up for two or three days and they hated having to pay the entire amount, and I don't blame them. Those folks last year were so thankful they didn't have to pay the full amount for a three-day ride," she said.

Dr. Tom Campbell has been a part of FreeWheel for 29 years. To him, what has changed most throughout the years has been the equipment, specifically the bicycles and camping equipment.

"Technology has vastly improved and has made biking much easier and camping much easier," he said. "But all of the FreeWheels have

FreeWheel 2008

What: Bicycle ride across Oklahoma

When: June 8-14

Registration: \$110 per adult and \$70 for children ages 6 to 15 if paid by April 30. For those who register after April 30, the cost is \$130 for adults and \$90 for children.

More information: 835-1699;
www.tulsaworld.com/freewheel

been absolutely wonderful. A few have been more challenging than others, but all in all they've been great."

Campbell said that when the weather begins warming up, FreeWheel is one of the first things on his mind.

"FreeWheel and spring, to me, is synonymous. The only thing you have to worry about is getting something to eat and drink. I don't read the paper, I don't listen to the radio; I'm just out there to ride and enjoy it," he said.

New this year will be a shower truck, which will follow the cycling group with the other support vehicles.

The truck, which has 17 hot showers, will be at the cyclists' campgrounds each night. Separate facilities for men and women will include sinks,

SEE RIDE A-14

'FreeWheel and spring, to me, is synonymous.

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DR. TOM CAMPBELL
ON FREEWHEEL

Book helps children deal with divorce

By NORA FROESCHLE
World Staff Writer

Monica Epperson, happily married for 14 years, cannot stop thinking about divorce.

Not hers, but those that affect children.

Her new book, "A Heart With Two Homes," explores the division children can feel within themselves if they develop different personalities with each parent.

Epperson has started Blended Love Inc., a nonprofit organization that seeks to help children deal with the effects of divorce.

"That is my No. 1 goal, to find and collect more resources and be able to get them into our public schools," she said.

For a start, Epperson, who is a Union High School graduate, donated copies of her book to libraries

Where to find it

"A Heart With Two Homes" is available at The Book Place, 732 W. New Orleans St. in Broken Arrow; Steve's Sundry Books and Magazines, 2612 S. Harvard Ave.; Amazon.com; and at Borders book stores in Tulsa.

in the Union district.

She did a reading from her book and spoke recently with a group of Union school counselors.

Although society tries to combat various ills such as drugs and premarital sex, Epperson said, the root causes are being ignored.



Epperson

"Don't do drugs, don't have premarital sex, but we're not looking at why. What kind of pain are they covering up?" she said.

Her own parents divorced when she was a child, Epperson said, but she had support in her community and school that helped keep her emotionally healthy.

Ken Bibb, her principal at Darnaby Elementary School, for instance, had a positive impact on her whole life, she said.

"You don't realize the impact a principal has. I maybe talked to him less than 20 times," she said.

The book is about a little girl named Elizabeth, who acts like a tomboy when she is with her father and like a "girly" girl with her mother. Plans for two separate birthday celebrations become a turning point for her as she demands that

she get one party with both her parents present.

The book contains pages for journal writing in the back to help children put their feelings out on paper, Epperson said.

Cheryl Biggs, a counselor at Briarglen Elementary School, said children of divorce mostly want the same thing: "They want their parents to get back together."

She added, "They get angry when it's time to go visit the other parent."

Kathy Dodd, the district's executive director for elementary education, said school counselors often address divorce and other issues from students' home lives.

"That's our job — to meet them where they are," she said.

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