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Caring for kids is a great business



Kids at Giggles and Grins Daycare

Caring for kids is a serious business. Nobody takes that more to heart than Anita Holt of Pontiac. She completed MSU Extension's 36-hour Better Kid Care (MiBKC) training program, and set about becoming a business owner.

She transformed her home into a state-of-the-art childcare facility and obtained a license from the state of Michigan. Her Giggles and Grins Daycare business, which opened in March, is all about young children and is devoted to providing the highest quality care possible.

MiBKC is comprehensive and includes follow-up mentoring for participants who are determined to become licensed childcare providers. The workshop sessions include information about the physical and emotional growth patterns of children from birth to 12 years old, how to recognize abnormal development and why positive discipline is imperative for healthy development.

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They also learn about the significant role that play provides in the early years of a child's life and creative ways to provide nutritious meals and snacks. Participants also learn CPR and first aid, including infant life-saving, how to respond successfully to choking and how to create an environment that is consistently healthy and safe for children of all ages.

Holt takes the health of the children in her care very seriously. She takes advantage of the Mid Michigan Childcare Food Program and uses their monthly menu suggestions. She is so committed to children's health she partners with her church to provide the Summer Food Service Program during the months the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Program is not available. Kids in first through fifth grades in her neighborhood can go to the church or daycare and eat a free meal.

Having learned that good oral hygiene is as important for a six-month old child with one tooth as it is for a six-year old with many teeth, she promotes the habit of regular tooth brushing and ensures every child brushes at least once a day while there. A typical day at Giggles and Grins includes outdoor play, reading time, active playtime and very limited television watching.

With an entrepreneurial spirit, Holt started with a dream, developed a plan and worked her way into a successful business venture. In the process, she created a rewarding career for herself and generated part-time jobs for two other people.

In 2010, Anita Holt will graduate from Oakland Community College with an associate's degree in early childhood development.

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Harnessing the power of volunteers



Master Gardener volunteers learn from MSU horticulture professor Art Cameron.

Is an MSU Extension Master Gardener volunteer always an MSU Extension Master Gardener volunteer? That depends. To maintain that status, volunteers must report their teaching and learning activities to the MSU Extension office.

Each volunteer is required to complete at least 15 hours of volunteer effort every year, including sharing their expertise with others in the community. In addition, each volunteer must participate in at least five hours of horticulture-related classes or workshops annually.

There are nearly 600 active and certified Extension Master Gardener volunteers in Oakland County. That's a lot of people who must find opportunities for on-going learning to maintain their certification. The learning opportunities can be delivered by MSU Extension or by other organizations.

In 2005, when this task became daunting for the Oakland County MSU Extension office, the staff brought a group of eight dedicated Master Gardener volunteers together to help develop an annual plan to meet the needs and wants of so many volunteers.

The Master Gardener Volunteer Program Continuing Education Committee assisted the staff in conducting a web-based survey that went to more than 1,200 residents, including active Master Gardener volunteers.

The committee learned what topics were of interest, what time of year the volunteers preferred to take part in programs, what format they liked best and what location worked best for them.

Since then, the staff and committee members have used this information to plan annual workshops for Master Gardener volunteers and other avid gardeners.

As a result of the information obtained from the survey, classes and workshops are offered on many topics, in a variety of formats and in many locations across the county. There are three- and four-week series, day-long classes, half-day classes, two- and three-hour classes and educational garden tours.

Some of the series provide up to 16 hours of continuing education credits. Each series features a number of presenters. Half of the presenters for the classes and workshops are Master Gardener volunteers who have expertise in various subjects.

Because there was so much demand for information about organic gardening, the committee implemented a three-week series called "Growing Vegetables Organically" in 2006. The class was so popular it has been repeated each year since and nearly 85 people have participated. The class focused on organic principles and practices, including management techniques, crop rotation, companion planting, beneficial insects, extending the growing season, planning, record keeping, composting and organic gardening products.

A follow-up evaluation was conducted after the growing season to determine if participants had changed their gardening practices based on what they learned in class.

Most participants reported:

- *Testing their soil for the first time*
- *Using crop rotation for the first time*
- *Hand picking insects rather than using chemical insecticides*

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For more information about any MSU Extension program, visit www.msue.msu.edu/oakland or call 248-858-0880.