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VOLUME 33 NO. 4

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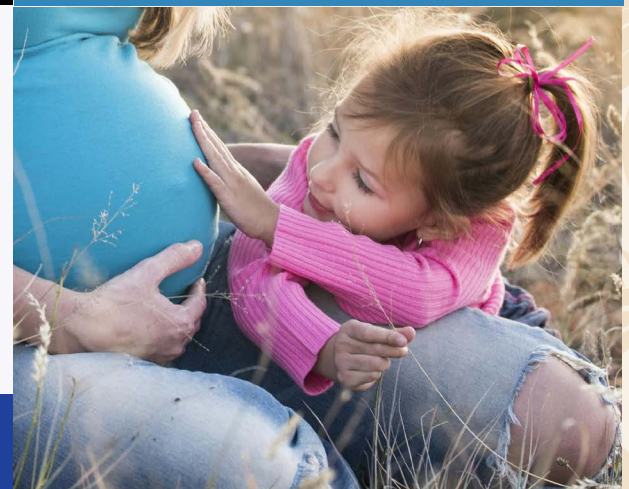
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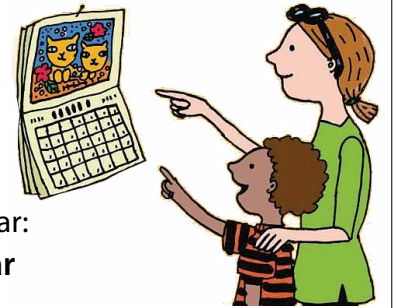
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*calendar*

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# Do You Have Concerns About Your Baby's Development?

## Most Babies At...

- 3 Months** Look from one object to another. Hold up their heads. Give eye contact.
- 6 Months** Reach and grasp objects. Look when their name is called. Roll over.
- 9 Months** Sit alone. Imitate gestures. Wave bye-bye.
- 12 Months** Take their first steps. Play with a variety of toys. Begin to say "mama."
- 18 Months** Walk alone. Build a tower of three blocks. Use up to 15 words. Enjoy interacting with caregivers.
- 24 Months** Begin to use two-word phrases to communicate. Eat and drink independently. Walk up and down stairs.



## FAR NORTHERN REGIONAL CENTER

Infants and toddlers from birth to age 36 months may be eligible for early intervention services through Far Northern Regional Center.



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**On the Cover:** Beloved Redding midwife Nora McNeill is celebrating 50 years of calmly and lovingly guiding women through the journey of bringing a new life into the world. Read her story on page 8.

**Photo by:** Brandon Ballard, a Northern California-based filmmaker and photographer specializing in cinematic storytelling, documentary and commercial video production. As the owner of Luminwood, he creates authentic, high-impact visual content for brands, nonprofits and events. [brandon@luminwood.com](mailto:brandon@luminwood.com).



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## Dear Readers

As they say, April showers bring May flowers - or will they? We all share concern as the warmer climate comes our way. Have we had enough rainfall to hold us?

The all-time low snowpack has us concerned, to say the least. We sincerely hope by the time this edition is published more raindrops have arrived in your garden and ours.

Find out about all the wonderful spring community offerings by checking out the North State Parent Family Calendar, where you'll find a bounty of events celebrating Week of the Young Child, National Autism Awareness Month, Child Abuse Prevention Month and more.

Come see us at the Little Red Hen's Walk for Autism in Chico, April 11, (see page 22 for details), and The Kids Day Festival in Weed on April 18, (see page 5 for details).

And enjoy Spring in the North State, rain or shine!

Warmly,  
Pamela Stacey

and the North State Parent Team



April Showers  
BRING  
May Flowers

SERVING FAMILIES IN BUTTE, GLENN, SHASTA, SISKIYOU & TEHAMA COUNTIES

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National Drug Help Line  
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National Substance Abuse and Mental Health Helpline  
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# Kimberly Johnson

## Creating Safe Spaces with Children's Legacy Center

Imagine you must share your most personal, traumatic experience with a total stranger. You must answer this person's probing questions in an unfamiliar setting, reliving a deeply troubling series of events that you wish you could forget.

Now imagine you have to do that again. And again. *And again.*

Now imagine you're only a child.

In pursuit of truth and justice, social workers, prosecutors, medical professionals, law enforcement investigators and victim advocates all need to hear the firsthand accounts of the children they're defending. Although designed to protect children, this kind of legal system inadvertently asks them to repeatedly recount their worst moments.

When Kimberly Johnson learned that abused and exploited children in Shasta County often endured six to ten interviews about their trauma before the case even reached the courtroom, she knew the North State could do better.

### Community Volunteering Inspires Innovative Solution

At the time, Kimberly was immersed in overseas anti-trafficking and orphan care work, "spending an average of six months a year all around the world and really pretty blind to what was happening in my own backyard," she says. So, she jumped into research and local volunteer opportunities in Redding, eager to find ways to protect children and families. As she began to learn more about the occurrence of and response to trauma, abuse and trafficking in the North State, Kimberly dreamed of coordinating all the responders so victims only had to tell their story once.

In 2016, Kimberly co-founded [Children's Legacy Center \(CLC\)](#), alongside chief deputy district attorney Sarah Murphy. CLC unites and aligns all the government agencies and medical partners involved in defending and restoring exploited youth in Shasta County. Notably, this partnership means that CLC conducts one-on-one, trauma-informed interviews in a non-threatening, self-paced environment.

While the child meets with the interviewer, the rest of the team observes the interview from another room, feeding questions to the interviewer through an earpiece so they get the information they need from a child's single interview.



Kimberly Johnson's passion to protect abused and exploited children led her to co-found Children's Legacy Center and work with other agencies to expand services to children throughout Shasta County.  
*Photo by Kristen Schmidt*

### CLC Offers Whole-Family Support

Beyond the interview, CLC also provides therapy and advocacy to help victimized children and families on the road to healing and recovery. While the forensic interviews focus on children, CLC's behavioral health clinic serves both children and adults who have faced trauma. Kimberly says, "We provide whole-family care, both to those we serve through CLC and to the broader community who have been impacted by trauma."

Shannon Phillips, chief operating officer of The McConnell foundation, describes Kimberly as "brilliant, funny, approachable and easy to be around," and says Kimberly has "a magnetic personality." Shannon remembers getting a call from Kimberly as she began dreaming up CLC. "My first takeaway from her was that she had this concept: Embrace love. She wanted to do something that's meaningful for kids."

### Teaming Up to Provide a Safe Space, Expand Services

Over the years, Shannon has watched Kimberly both refine and expand her mission and vision for CLC, which has included competing for and winning statewide grants. In 2024, Kimberly led CLC to form a partnership with One Safe Place (OSP), a nonprofit organization fighting against domestic and family violence, sexual assault and other types of abuse. "Kimberly is further dialed into how to do systemic change than the average person," says Shannon.

Led by her unique vision and perspective, Kimberly and the CLC and OSP teams – which operate under a shared leadership structure while remaining distinct organizations – have expanded their focus to include foster youth. Through a research initiative called the Aster Project, developed in partnership with The McConnell Foundation, Kimberly says her teams "are working to better understand the barriers to serving foster youth in the region and identify what it would take to close those gaps."

Kimberly recognizes her role as just one seat at the table. "Ultimately, all of the partners were the ones who designed the core work that we do every day," she says. As CLC celebrates its

10th anniversary, Kimberly celebrates the depth and breadth of its organizational growth and anticipates new opportunities to build on the established foundation. "It finally feels really steadfast and steady," she says. "There's something really beautiful – especially for kids and families and for our staff – about reaching a place that is steady."

### Meeting People Where They are in Their Trauma Experience

If you or someone you know has experienced any sort of victimization or trauma, Kimberly encourages you to reach out. One Safe Place offers a 24-hour crisis hotline for immediate support and CLC provides access to therapy and behavioral health services. Both agencies accept referrals and direct inquiries in response to all sorts of trauma, from domestic violence to hate crimes or even spiritual abuse. "Everyone's experience and how they define trauma is different," Kimberly says. "We're here to meet you where you are, so reach out."

To better serve those who reach out, CLC and OSP offer a 24-hour crisis hotline. "We're constantly looking for volunteers who are willing to be part of our crisis hotline, because that allows us to relieve our staff," Kimberly says. Hotline responders are well equipped through an intensive 66-hour training before ever responding to a call. "It's a pretty heavy investment," Kimberly says, "but you know you're doing really noble work."

Thanks to the noble work of people like Kimberly and the talented teams she leads, children and families in the North State have options of safe places to go. ■



Jenna Christophersen is a Chico native who fell in love with writing as she wrote her first words as a student at McManus Elementary School.

Kimberly and the team after the Give Redding Holiday Food Drive



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## Redding Midwife

# Nora McNeill

## A 50-Year Legacy of Beautiful Birthing Experiences

“Nora is amazing. She knows just what to say to each person to comfort them and guide through the birth process.” This and many other similar glowing statements praising Nora McNeill were expressed recently at a celebration honoring Nora’s 50 years of helping women experience the miracle of childbirth with calm, loving, gentle, nurturing guidance.

One woman tearfully testified to Nora’s generous and welcoming spirit. She and her husband had made careful plans to give birth in their mountain home. They had traveled many miles to Redding to shop, when her water broke. A fast-moving storm prevented them from returning home and they didn’t know where to turn. They called their hometown doctor from their car, rain pouring down, the road home was closed due to snow. Their doctor said he knew of a good midwife in Redding and gave them Nora’s address. They knocked on Nora’s door and asked if she could help them. Nora welcomed them warmly, fed them and helped them have the beautiful birth experience they had hoped to have, right there in her home.

### The Journey to Midwifery

Nora became captivated by the beauty of birth when, as a little girl, she watched her cat having kittens. Little did she know that experience would set her feet on a path to a midwifery practice that has immeasurably enriched the lives of over 1,000 mothers and babies.

“I’ll never forget the first birth I attended,” Nora says. “As I was driving home from the birth, I looked down at my hands and said, ‘Wow, these hands just caught a brand-new baby.’ And I still think that today. It’s a pretty amazing thing.”

Nora has faced challenges and prejudice over the years despite the fact many current studies show that midwifery care leads to lower cesarean rates, reduced preterm birth and low birth weight, improved maternal satisfaction and breastfeeding rates and safe outcomes for planned home or birth center deliveries in low-risk pregnancies.

### Normal and Natural Births

Nora prefers the term “normal birth” to what many call natural birth. “The term ‘natural birth’ is used by the medical model to mean any birth that is not a cesarean section,” Nora says. “I wanted to use a term that differentiates birth from the medical model. I started thinking that ‘I am working to help people have a normal birth.’”

She has come to understand that fear and anxiety complicate the birth

►

Nora’s calm and reassuring touch helps alleviate expectant mothers’ anxiety, leading to more peaceful, joyful birth experiences.

Photos provided by Nora McNeill



experience, often causing undue tension and pain. “The normal process is pretty simple. If you watch animals giving birth, they are just doing what their bodies are telling them to do. They are just instinctively giving birth.”

### Prenatal and Birth Care

Most prospective parents looking for a home birth with Nora come to her by word of mouth. “They’ve heard a testimonial from friends about what it was like having a baby with me,” she says. “I realized with my first that the hospital birth was not what I was wanting,” says Noel McNeill, mother of eight. “All our babies have been birthed with Nora and she is family now.”

Nora offers a free one to one and half-hour consultation, during which she explains her philosophy about birthing and what to expect preparing for and experiencing a birth in her birthing center. Pregnant moms come once a month for prenatal exams until 30 weeks of gestation, every two weeks after that until 36 weeks and then every week until the baby is born.

Moms labor and deliver in the beautiful birthing suite in Nora’s home, just two minutes from Mercy Hospital. A comfortable arrangement, including a charmingly decorated family room, two bedrooms and two bathrooms, create a nurturing space for parents and any of their chosen birth attendants to experience the miracle of birth. A lush lawn and lovely garden provide a space for those wishing to labor outdoors in nature.

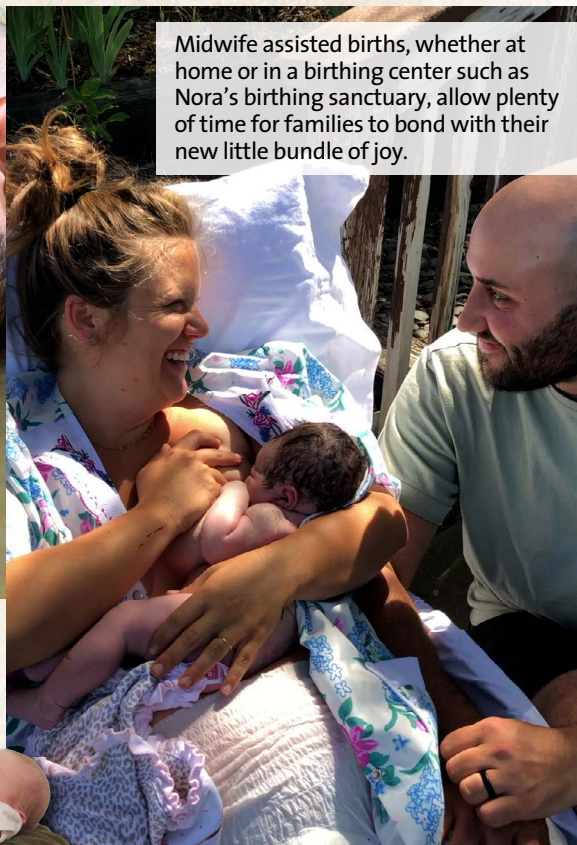
### Proper Nutrition is Key to a Healthy Gestation and Delivery

“Babies are made out of what moms eat,” Nora tells prospective moms. “Babies’ body tissues are made up of the nutrition that moms take in. Good nutrition helps mom’s body to safely carry a fetus for nine months. We ask at each prenatal appointment ‘What did you feed your baby today?’ We put the question where it belongs.”

Nora encourages mothers to be sure they have high quality nutrition after a cesarean to assist the uterine tissue to grow back strong and healthy so that if that mother becomes pregnant again and wants to avoid a cesarean section, her uterus will be better equipped to handle the challenges of labor.

### Support for Difficult Hospital Births

Nora is dedicated to giving the highest standard of care to her clients. She knows that some higher risk births are best supported in a hospital setting. Her assistant, Destiny Conover, can attest that Nora is there every step of the way, working with hospital medical teams to provide the best care possible for mom and baby. Destiny had a high-risk pregnancy and was confined to a hospital bed for several weeks. The baby came early and had to be placed in the NICU. “Nora was with me throughout this difficult journey, providing comfort & guidance.”



Midwife assisted births, whether at home or in a birthing center such as Nora’s birthing sanctuary, allow plenty of time for families to bond with their new little bundle of joy.



Nora is dedicated to teaching and mentoring the next generation of midwives.



### Passing on 50 Years of Wisdom

Nora has tried to retire several times over the years, but each time she has felt the deep calling to care for families urging her back to service. “I don’t know when I will retire,” she says. “But I feel it is important to pass on what I have learned to the next generation of midwives.” Student midwives provide extra support and attention to birthing moms in her practice as she mentors and trains them to eventually start practices of their own. Several midwives that Nora has mentored over the years spoke at her 50th anniversary celebration, expressing their gratitude for Nora’s deep wisdom she so generously shares with students and the high standards of care she teaches them.

What is most compelling about the home birth experience is the transformation that can occur for women who choose this way of bringing a child into the world. “After I had my first baby with Nora, I felt like I was a person, not just a number in a hospital,” says Brenda Porter with wonder in her voice and tears in her eyes. “It’s powerful to see women championing their birth,” Nora says. “Where they were initially timid and afraid and then come out of the experience empowered and strong.”

To learn more about Nora or schedule a consultation, go to [reddingmidwife.com](http://reddingmidwife.com) or call (530) 638-0161. ■



After an unhappy hospital birth experience, Stacey had the second of her two children at home with a midwife; a beautiful, peaceful experience with much reduced labor time and pain. One of her most precious photos is of her two-year-old son nestled on the couch smiling and holding his new, minutes-old brother in his arms.



Palermo Union Elementary School District



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 ⓓⓈ Ages: 2 years 6 months - 5 years • M-F, 8am-5:30pm  
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## SHASTA COUNTY

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### Kids Interconnections Preschool & TK

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 Ⓜ Ages: 3-6 yrs • AM class 8:45am-11:45pm • PM class 12-2:45pm. Experienced preschool teacher with a BA in early childhood education; accepts SCOE Alternative Payment. Your child will be prepared for kindergarten and develop social, emotional, physical, language and cognitive skills in a warm, home-like small class. Lic# 455408509

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[reddingchristian.com](http://reddingchristian.com)  
 Preschool: Ages: 2.5-4 yrs • M-F, 7:30am-4:30pm; mid-Aug to beginning of June. 3-5 half or full days.  
 TK: Ages: 4-5 years • M-F AM class 8-11am; PM class 11:45-2:45pm; mid-August to beginning of June.  
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[shastaheadstart.org](http://shastaheadstart.org). ⓓⓈⓂ Ages: 0-5 yrs • M-F, 8am-4:30pm  
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[reddingtlc.org](http://reddingtlc.org) • [crystal@reddingtlc.org](mailto:crystal@reddingtlc.org). ⓓⓈ Ages: 0-5 yrs, M-F, 7:30am-5:30pm. A meaningful Christian education. Experienced teachers teach the love of Christ and curriculum to ensure each child is ready for kindergarten and beyond. Lic# 4151373105

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[westreddingpreschool.com](http://westreddingpreschool.com)  
 ⓓⓈⓂ Ages: 6wks-12 yrs • M-F, 7am - 5:30pm  
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710 Everitt Memorial Hwy, Mt Shasta • (530) 918-2550  
[shastaheadstart.org](http://shastaheadstart.org)  
 ⓓⓈⓂ Ages: 0-5 yrs • M-F, 8am-4:30pm  
 Private, non-profit provides high quality childcare and social services to low-income children and their families. Locations in Mt Shasta, Weed and Yreka. Lic# 445406084

### Siskiyou Child Care Council

Fort Jones, McCloud, Dunsmuir, Lane Street (Yreka)  
 SisQ Kids (Weed) • (530) 938-2748  
[tstacher@siskiyouchildcare.org](mailto:tstacher@siskiyouchildcare.org)  
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### Kotasik Daycare

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 ⓈⓂ Ages: 2-5yrs • M-F, 7:30am-5:30pm  
 All staff are fully qualified, first aid and CPR certified. Drop-ins welcome. Subsidized payment accepted. Breakfast and Lunch served family-style. Lic# 525407977

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- Ⓢ = Snacks Served
- Ⓜ = Meals Served



for families  
By Sarah Steger



photos provided by  
Ferris Wheel Kids

## Ferris Wheel Kids: Redding's Downtown Toy Store Built for Families & Community

Downtown Redding just got a little more colorful. Ferris Wheel Kids, the brainchild of two longtime friends and neighbors, is part toy store, part community hangout and entirely built with love, from the lowered shelves children can reach to the play area that allows parents to shop while kids are having fun.

**Tara Faires and Suzanne Russell** are the owners of Ferris Wheel Kids and with over a decade of experience working in retail, the two moms welcome the entire family to visit a space that has something for everyone.

### A Children's Store Built on Friendship and Family

The duo was inspired to open the store in downtown Redding because it is next door to Suzanne's women's clothing store Carousel, where Tara had been a manager for five years. "We were also neighbors at the time Ferris Wheel Kids became an idea, while in Suzanne's backyard, eating tacos," says Tara. "Kind of a fun idea, something to dream about - taking over the street and making that part of downtown more inviting and interesting. At that point, we weren't moms, so the idea stayed just that - an idea. But as we grew our families, we realized there really wasn't a place in Redding that catered to kids or offered something truly unique and fun for them as well as for the parents. When the space we had our eyes on became available, we jumped at the opportunity." They quickly worked with their families to build furniture, paint and craft a space for customers who love fun, color and whimsy.

The store features items that the owners, their friends or other parents have recommended and used with their children and loved. They also select products that will last and can be passed down from child to child. The shop highlights outdoor living and sustainability in its inventory and they specialize in offering items for newborns to age 12. "The hang space is really designed to keep kids happy so parents can have a more stress-free shopping experience and the kids can enjoy themselves and explore the space," Tara says. Details found in the bathroom and special kid-approved snacks create a space that is not just made for kids, but anyone who is a kid at heart.

### High-Value Extras Come with Shopping Local

In-person buying fuels the philosophy of the shop as Suzanne and Tara work with producers to make sure their customers are getting the best products. "Shopping online is certainly convenient, but it lacks a personal touch and relationship," says Suzanne. "When you shop at a local retailer, you start to inform them what to offer."

"We remember the things our customers like, run things out to their car when life feels too full to come in. We do birthday wish lists to encourage local shopping and more. Plus, when you meet real people and have conversations and experiences, you make

friends, get life tips, maybe a snack and leave with extra cute gift wrapping." The shop is also a great stop for grandparents, aunts, uncles - anyone looking for birthday and new baby gifts. "It truly is a local one-stop shop for anything kiddo!" says Suzanne.

### A Space for Education and Community

Ferris Wheel Kids offers local and sustainable, well-made products, but Suzanne and Tara are also devoted to working with local moms and families to create a space in the store for community connection and an opportunity for learning. "Since opening, we have been so excited to partner with local kids and moms for all our events," Tara says. "Using our Mini Maker platform, our way of highlighting local kiddo entrepreneurs, we not only offer space for them to sell their goods, but also education on marketing, wholesale and branding. We have loved partnering with other local moms for our First Friday events: balloon twisting from Totally Twisted by Hannah, Face Painting by Aimee Gagner, a local book signing with author Debi Chimenti and our first-ever playdough bar by The Salty Dough Co. Moms. We've done book readings with local business owners, partnering with local bookstore Shop Around the Corner Books. Moving forward, as we celebrate being in business for a year, we plan on doing music hours, a kid maker fair and more."

Tara and Suzanne recognize that their shop's ability to exist is dependent on the community. "We wouldn't have been able to open FWK without community support," says Suzanne. "We truly wouldn't be here without people intentionally choosing to support local. In return, we sponsor school fundraisers, events, participate in toy drives and more. We hope to expand our Mini Maker program, encourage more entrepreneurs in Redding and grow with this generation."

Being responsive to customers' needs and the community's needs is nestled at the center of this creative endeavor, with a focus on supporting families in so many ways. Tara and Suzanne both say, "We want our community to know we are here for you." Their goal is for you to have a great experience, find what you're looking for, feel welcome and to be a place to which you and your kids want to return. "It takes a village," says Tara, "and we want to be a part of yours! We are moms taking a risk and we really appreciate every single person who walks through our door." Ferris Wheel Kids is located at 1501 Yuba St. Follow them on Instagram and Facebook. ■



Sarah Steger is a mother of two, an educator and a business owner in Siskiyou County. She believes that supporting local small businesses helps to create strong, healthy and lively communities.

# THIS IS TEHAMA



The ancient word “Tehama” once meant a place where rivers could be crossed. With our county’s rich currents of history, happenings and hope, this is our crossing place today – where we meet to celebrate our beautiful Tehama County.

## POLISH UP YOUR BOOTS & TIP YOUR HAT IN HONOR OF RED BLUFF'S 150TH AND TEHAMA COUNTY'S 170TH ANNIVERSARIES

Nothing brings out the cowgirls and cowboys like April and the Red Bluff Round-Up –and this April is set to have the most grit and glory of them all. The west has been kept alive in Red Bluff for 150 years and Tehama County for 170, through three Red Bluff pillars that this year are joining together to celebrate their individual and collective histories.

### The Red Bluff Round-Up Illuminates Red Bluff's Cattle Roots

When Tehama County was established in 1856, it was known for its extensive farmland and rangeland and its history was being etched by the hooves of the animals that brought its earliest inhabitants and helped them flourish. One of the primary focuses of the Red Bluff Round-Up is to honor the part animals played in area history.

By the time Red Bluff was incorporated in 1876, the railroad was here and the agricultural hub was frequented by several “Cattle Kings” with their thousands of heads of cattle, who mingled with the “rancheros” (owners of “ranchos” or Mexican land grants).

### The Red Bluff Round-Up will kick off its events

**April 9 with Cowboy Coffee at 7:45am at Red Bluff Dodge, 545 Adobe Road, featuring free live music and breakfast. The Countdown to Round-Up schedule will be announced, culminating in the 105th rodeo starting April 17. [redbluffroundup.com](http://redbluffroundup.com)**

### Red Bluff Celebration and Round-Up Museum Connect the Past with the Present

Red Bluff’s western tradition and the animals who made it possible are celebrated each April at the Red Bluff Round-Up, renowned as America’s largest three-day rodeo, and the many events surrounding the rodeo. These activities serve as a connection to the past and a way to draw communities together through entertainment—making a significant economic impact each year. Even at its inception in 1921, the Round-Up drew close to 10,000 spectators and now draws an average of 35,000. General manager J.B. Stacey explains that a visit to the Round-Up Museum will amaze visitors with the history of a town built on western tradition. “The Museum was brought to Tehama County from the vision of past museum president, George Froome and the Round-Up directors over 20 years ago. It houses over 100 years of Rodeo History, not only from Red Bluff, but from the Rodeo Hall of Fame. It is free to the public to come and experience some Rodeo history.”

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North State Parent Magazine celebrates these Tehama County milestones and seven years of the This is Tehama Column.

Steeped in family values, Red Bluff Round-Up honors the animals that helped families build a life in this bountiful region. Photo by Crystal Amen

### The Kelly-Griggs House Museum Celebrates a Pioneering Woman and Her Family

Built in the early 1880s, The Kelly-Griggs House witnessed many of the comings and goings in early Red Bluff. We may think of a classic Victorian lady when we think of the first lady of the Kelly-Griggs House, Melvina Griggs. But legend has it that 17-year-old Melvina Roundtree first arrived in the area after trailing 1,000 head of cattle overland from Tennessee with her brothers while their parents made the trip around the Horn. In 1885, as a young widow with two boys, Melvina met and married Sidney Griggs, a gold miner turned sheep and cattle rancher. Sidney moved his new wife and stepchildren into his spacious home on the corner of Washington and Ash Streets.

This historic home was preserved as the Kelly-Griggs House Museum in 1965. The museum will celebrate its proud history by hosting a 150th Red Bluff Anniversary Celebration April 11 with live music, food, vendors, old-fashioned children's games, museum tours and more, 9am – 4pm, 311 Washington Street. Call [530]527-1129 for more information.

### Whitt Hall Fire Museum Commemorates Mission to Protect Red Bluff Settlers

Red Bluff expansion relied heavily on several horse-powered volunteer firefighting companies to protect the growing population and fine Victorian homes, which often served as the townhomes for the area's prosperous sheep and cattle ranchers. Station 2, now known as the Whitt Hall Fire Museum, was built in 1906 to improve response times on the west side of town. It originally housed two fire steamers pulled by horses and then, in 1918, their first motorized engine, Putty Put. 2026 marks the 150th anniversary of the merger of the various volunteer departments into the Red Bluff Fire Department. To tour the Whitt Hall Fire Museum, call [530]527-1126.

The Red Bluff Fire Department will shine up its original motorized engine, Putty Put, for the Red Bluff Round-Up Parade April 18 and to celebrate the Fire Department's 150th year. The parade, starting downtown at 10 am, is themed "150 years of Stars and Stripes and Hometown Spirit." ■



Kate Hiller has enjoyed writing the This is Tehama column and has her own nostalgic western connection with Tehama County. When living in Modoc County and traveling down to Tehama, she always stopped by to visit Jim and Thelma Owens.

The Owens Family Tehama County ranching history goes back over 150 years. Kate's dad, Pete Weber, was shipping cattle with Jim Owens on the day Jim died, the way he wanted to, with his boots on.



With Kelly-Griggs House Museum providing a stately background, museum docent Sam Storey poses in period attire with vintage Red Bluff Fire Engine 6, which will join Whitt Hall Fire Museum's vintage Putty Put fire engine in the Red Bluff Round-Up parade. Photo by Kate Hiller

# Grow Your Preschooler's Math Brain Everyday Moments That Count

We all cheer when our children sing the alphabet song for the first time or recite bedtime stories from memory. Parents understand how vital reading is to future school achievement. But did you know preschool math has just as big of an impact on preschool brains? Research shows that early math ability is just as strong a predictor of future academic success as reading skills.

Fortunately, preschool math is everywhere young children live and play, whether it's counting goldfish during snack time, sorting socks during chore time or identifying foam numbers in the bath. "In our work at the Shasta College Early Education Center, we recognize that math emerges naturally through children's play, relationships and investigations," says Beverly Mullally Charsha, MA, director, Early Childhood Education Center at Shasta College. "Rather than isolated lessons, we focus on creating environments that invite inquiry—where children explore patterns, relationships and problem-solving in meaningful contexts. When math is rooted in real experiences, it becomes both joyful and deeply understood."

Here are some ways to engage little learners in the world of math.

## Fun with Food Shapes

Shape sandwiches, fruits, crackers, cookies and cakes with cookie cutters. Talk about the natural shapes that vegetables take. Pizzas, pancakes and cookies are circles. Many crackers are squares, rectangles and triangles. Teach your child patterns by putting several different shaped crackers together in a row. What different shapes can your child make by combining foods?

## Laundry Lessons

Sort the laundry by colors, family members or type of clothing (pants, skirts or shirts). Have your preschooler match the socks. If you have socks left over, introduce the concept of even and odd. Matches make even numbers; leftover socks make odd numbers.

## On a Roll

Card and dice games teach children how to subitize. Subitizing is the ability to look at small sets of numbers and quickly know how many numbers are in the set. An example of subitizing is automatically knowing the number when rolling dice without counting dots. This is an important skill that preschoolers will need later when they add and subtract. Card games to try: Crazy Eights, Old Maid and Go Fish. Dice games: Beat That! Roll and Cover and One and Done.

## Not Just Fun and Games

I know, playing Chutes and Ladders for what seems like the millionth time is not fun for adults. But it is fun for preschoolers and playing it helps them develop some important math skills like number recognition and counting forward and backward. The number line is a powerful visual model for adding and subtracting and Chutes and Ladders is an engaging way to use that model. Other preschooler board games that support early math skills are Hi Ho! Cherry-O and Feed the Wozzle.

## Math Through Movement

Preschoolers love to be active and physical exercise is a way for preschoolers to practice counting and learn directionality vocabulary. Have your preschooler count the number of jumping jacks, jump rope hops or toe touches he or she does. Play hopscotch and count the numbers as they jump. Learning directional words like on, over, before, between, right, left, front and back is important, too. As they exercise, have children move according to those words.

## Math Melodies

Goofy songs and sayings help children remember and preschoolers are totally into silly. Sing math songs in the car, while you swing and when you are doing chores. Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed, The Ants Go Marching On and One, Two, Buckle My Shoe are good examples of catchy rhyming songs that get preschoolers' attention. Numberock has fun math videos and songs for preschoolers and older children. If your child loves reading, many traditional math songs and rhymes are made into books.

## Block Power

Stacking blocks or building with Legos is a powerful way to build early math skills with preschoolers. Counting, measurement, pattern recognition and critical thinking skills that promote STEM are a few of the benefits of building with blocks.

## Market Math

The grocery store is stocked full of math. When you are in the produce department, help your preschooler count and weigh fruits or vegetables without going over a certain number of pounds. Explore price tags and sale tags, count the number of items you need or that are in the cart, identify foods by shape. Granted, some of the math may be too complex for a preschooler, but if they shop with you regularly, they will pick up skills as they grow.

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**Bubble Bath Math**

Preschoolers often end each day in the bathtub, another place for pre-school learning. Foam numerals stick to the tub walls when they are wet. Call out a number and have your child quickly identify the correct foam numeral and slap it to the tub wall. Have your preschooler practice ordering and counting the foam numerals. Add toys to the bath one-by-one and count on each toy added. Take toys out of the bath and ask your child how many toys are left. Sort toys by color, shape or size or have your child subitize sets of toys in the water.

**Make Play Dough**

“Making playdough naturally builds early math skills because children engage in hands-on measuring, counting, and comparing as they create it,” says Beverly. “ They practice concepts like quantity when adding cups of flour or teaspoons of salt and begin to understand fractions and proportions by following a recipe. As they mix and adjust ingredients, they explore cause-and-effect and problem-solving, noticing how changes in amounts affect texture. This kind of sensory, real-world experience helps children develop foundational math concepts in a meaningful and engaging way.” Try the easy play dough recipe in the sidebar with your child. Math for preschoolers is foundational, but it can also be fun. Try some of these ideas and pave the way to future successes in school and beyond. ■



Beverly proudly displays her homemade play dough used to teach preschoolers many pre-math concepts, preparing them for success in math and science. Photo provided by Beverly Mullaly Charsha

**Picture Books that Count**

These engaging reads bring math skills and literature together for young children.

**COUNTING**

- *Ten Black Dots* by Donald Crews
- *Chicka Chicka 123* by B. Martin Jr, M. Sampson & L. Ehlert
- *Mouse Count* by Ellen Stoll Walsh
- *The Crayons Book of Numbers* by Drew Daywalt
- *Ten Flashing Fireflies* by Philemon Sturges

**PATTERNS**

- *Pitter, Pattern* by Joyce Hesselberth
- *Pattern Fish* by Trudy Harris
- *Beep, Beep, Vroom, Vroom!* By Stuart J. Murphy
- *I See a Pattern Here* by Bruce Goldstone

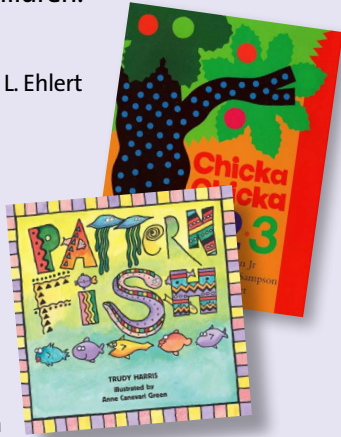
**SHAPES**

- *Mouse Shapes* by Ellen Stoll Walsh
- *Tangled: A Story About Shapes* by Anne Miranda
- *Shape by Shape* by Suse MacDonald
- *Ship Shapes* by Stella Blackstone

**SPATIAL REASONING**

- *Shrinking Mouse* by Pat Hutchins
- *Over, Under and Through* by T. Hoban
- *In Between Things* by Priscilla Tey

And so many more!  
Go to [zerotothree.org](http://zerotothree.org) for more math & science toddler book suggestions



**Beverly's Playdough Recipe**

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 4 teaspoons cream of tartar
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- quart sized bags
- 3/4 cup salt
- 2 cups lukewarm water
- Food coloring

Mix the flour, salt and cream of tartar in a large pot. Add the water and oil, and if you're making a single color, mix in the coloring at this stage. Place the pot over medium heat and stir continuously until the mixture thickens and forms a ball. I like to use a nonstick electric skillet on very low heat. Remove it from the heat and transfer the dough to a gallon-sized bag or a sheet of wax paper. If you don't have any of those items, place a small handful of flour on the table. Let the dough cool slightly, then knead until smooth. Kneading warm play dough on a cold day is the best!

If you plan to use multiple colors, divide the dough into separate portions based on how many colors you want. Place each portion into a quart-sized bag, add about five drops of coloring (adjusting for brightness as needed), and knead the dough inside the bag to avoid staining your hands. Once fully mixed, it's ready to use.



Janeen Lewis is a mom, teacher and writer. She loves to see young learners get excited about math.



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# Siskiyou County News

## Laura Baltayan

### Local Nurse Practitioner Provides Personalized, Patient-Centered Care

Since the first formal Nurse Practitioner program was established at the University of Colorado in 1965, the role of nurse practitioners (NPs) has evolved into one of the most vital pillars of modern health care. What began as a specialized extension of pediatric care has grown into a dynamic field rooted in comprehensive, patient-centered medicine. Today, NPs are known not only for their clinical expertise, but for their ability to deliver care with a level of attentiveness and compassion that patients deeply value.

Nurse practitioners are Advanced Practice Registered Nurses who undergo extensive graduate-level training. They are qualified to perform physical exams, diagnose conditions, order and interpret diagnostic tests, prescribe treatments and coordinate care with specialists – serving as both clinicians and trusted partners in their patients' health journeys.

#### A Philosophy of Prevention and Whole-Person Care

For Laura Baltayan, NP at [Shasta Cascade Health Centers](#) (SCHC), health care is about far more than treating symptoms—it is about understanding the whole person. Laura initially began her academic path in psychology, drawn to the complexities of human behavior and mental health. It wasn't long before she realized she wanted to expand that focus, integrating both physical and emotional well-being into her approach. She transitioned into nursing, ultimately becoming a nurse practitioner.

Her early career in oncology shaped her perspective in a profound way. Over seven years in the hospital setting, Laura cared for patients facing advanced and often preventable chronic illnesses. "I was seeing patients at some of their most vulnerable moments," she reflects. "Many of the conditions I encountered could have been prevented or better managed earlier on. That experience really shifted my focus toward prevention."

Today, in her role as a primary care provider, Laura sees patients across the life span – from young children to older adults. Her approach is deeply collaborative. "I take time to listen," she says. "Every patient has a unique story, and I believe care should be tailored to that. Together, we create a plan that supports both physical and mental health."

#### A Community-Centered Approach to Care

Laura was living in Los Angeles when she was recruited to SCHC, a decision that ultimately brought her to Northern California. What stood out most was the organization's culture—one rooted in warmth, accessibility and a genuine commitment to both patients and providers.

Shasta Cascade Health Centers, with clinics in Mount Shasta, McCloud and Dunsmuir, was founded in 2000 by Mary "Bunny" Hearst-Ives. Originally established as the McCloud Health Care Clinic, its mission was simple yet powerful: to provide accessible, high-quality care to underserved communities. Over the years, it has

grown into a Federally Qualified Health Center, offering services to patients with Medi-Cal, Medicare, private insurance and those in need of sliding-scale care.

The clinic continues to expand its offerings with a thoughtful, integrative approach. "We're really building something special here," Laura says. "We have an acupuncturist, a chiropractor, dentist and visiting specialists in fields such as podiatry. We will soon have an optometrist and we are continuing to grow. It allows us to support patients in a more comprehensive way."

#### Nurturing Health from an Early Age

One of Laura's greatest passions is working with children. "Kids are incredibly honest and intuitive," she says. "They're our future, and it's so important that we help them build a strong foundation for health early on."

Her advice for families is refreshingly simple: encourage movement, prioritize whole foods and create balance. "Limiting screen time and getting kids outside – whether it's sports, hiking, biking or just playing – makes a huge difference," she says. "Nutrition is just as important. Fresh, whole foods over processed options can really shape long-term health. And of course, we can't forget basics like sunscreen and water safety."

Beyond the physical benefits, Laura emphasizes the importance of helping children develop awareness of their own bodies. "Kids are naturally curious," she says. "When we teach them to listen to their bodies and make healthy choices, we're giving them tools that last a lifetime."

#### A Vision for Lifelong Wellness

At the heart of Laura's philosophy is a simple but powerful belief: the body is designed to thrive when given the right support. "The body wants to be healthy," she says. "When we nourish it, move it and take care of our mental well-being, we can prevent so many chronic conditions."

She emphasizes that the habits formed early in life – maintaining a healthy weight, staying active, eating well and cultivating supportive relationships—can have a profound impact on long-term outcomes.

In a health care landscape that is often fast-paced and fragmented, Laura's approach stands out for its intention and depth. By combining clinical expertise with genuine connection, she is helping to redefine what it means to truly care for patients—not just in moments of illness, but across a lifetime of health. ■



As a single parent of two boys, Stacey found the resources provided by local nonprofit agencies vital for her and her family to thrive under very challenging circumstances.

“Every patient has a unique story, and I believe care should be tailored to that. Together, we create a plan that supports both physical and mental health.”

NP Laura Baltayan is dedicated to teaching children how to care for their bodies and develop healthy eating and exercise habits to prevent chronic diseases in adulthood.  
*Photo by Pamela Newman*



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- Waterworks Park
- **When Pie Meets Bread**



# How to Throw a Sensory Safe Birthday Party

**B**irthday parties are supposed to be magical, with balloons, singing “Happy Birthday,” party games and spending time with family and friends. But if you have a child with sensory processing differences, the party can feel overwhelming even before it begins. If you’ve ever considered skipping a celebration entirely because it just felt easier, you are not alone. Even if it feels a little intimidating at first, creating a sensory-safe birthday party can still make for a fun event.

## Design The Party Around Your Child’s Needs

Before you pick a theme or order a cake, consider what type of environment makes your child feel comfortable. Some children do great in small groups but completely shut down in a crowd. Others need structure and predictability to feel safe. Some love hands-on activities, but loud, fast-paced games are just too much. A birthday party doesn’t have to include a lot of kids and a loud, bright environment to be a hit. For some children, two good friends and cupcakes at the kitchen table is perfect. For others, a cozy movie night with cousins feels just right. A successful party isn’t about how big it is – it’s about whether your child feels safe and happy.

## How To Set the Party Up for Success

Keep the guest list small. Fewer kids usually means less noise, fewer surprises and more manageable social moments. It also gives you room to support your child without feeling pulled in ten directions at once.

## Set Expectations

Let guests (and parents) know you’re planning a sensory-friendly celebration in advance. Knowing what to expect puts people at ease because it sets the tone from the start.

## Build A Calm Atmosphere

Bright lights, loud music and a noisy crowd can be too much for some children to handle. Choosing softer lighting and low-volume activities can make the atmosphere feel calmer. Hosting the party in a familiar place, like your home or a favorite park, can also help ease anxiety. Creating a small, quiet space with pillows, a tent, headphones or other comfort items gives the children a place to reset if things feel too intense.

## Create A Gentle Flow

When a party feels like one big blur of noise and activity, it can be a lot to handle. Adding a gentle structure to the day can make everything feel more manageable. Guests might arrive and have a short period of free play, followed by one guided activity, then cake and finally a calm closing activity. Having predictable transitions or even a simple visual schedule with pictures can reduce uncertainty.

## Choose Low-Pressure Activities

Simple crafts, cupcake decorating, LEGO building, simple scavenger hunts, sensory stations, bubble play or a movie with blankets can be wonderful alternatives to loud, competitive games. A party doesn’t have to be nonstop excitement. Participation doesn’t have to be mandatory either. Some children feel safest observing before joining in and that’s OK.

## Prepare Ahead

Talk with your child about party plans, including who will be there, what activities will take place and where the quiet space will be. Most importantly, give your child permission to take breaks. Knowing they are allowed to step away empowers them to self-regulate rather than push past their limits.

## Ask For Help If You Need It

It’s OK to acknowledge your own stress. Hosting a party when you’re constantly scanning for signs of overwhelm is a lot for anyone. Ask for help if you can, whether it be a family member or friend to greet guests, refill drinks or quietly redirect children. You don’t have to do it alone.

It’s also OK if the party isn’t picture-perfect. If your child spends half the party in a quiet corner but comes out for cake, that’s still a win. If you must wrap things up early because they’ve had enough, that’s fine, too. Adjusting the plan isn’t failing; it’s just responsive parenting. What really matters is that your child feels celebrated in a way that fits who they are.

When you create a party that honors their needs, you’re doing more than planning a birthday. You’re building trust, helping them feel safe and making core memories – and that’s what they’ll carry with them. ■

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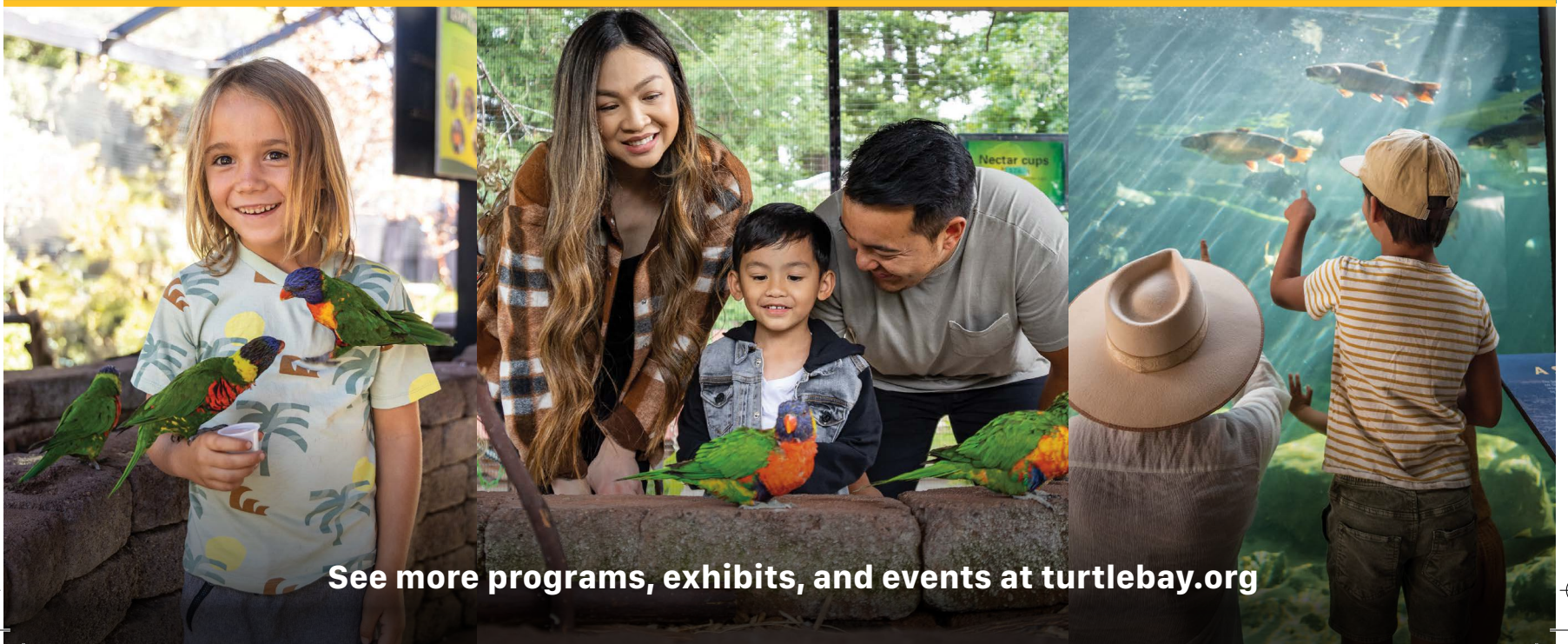
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