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**APRIL 2024**  
VOLUME 31 NO. 6

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# NORTH STATE Parent

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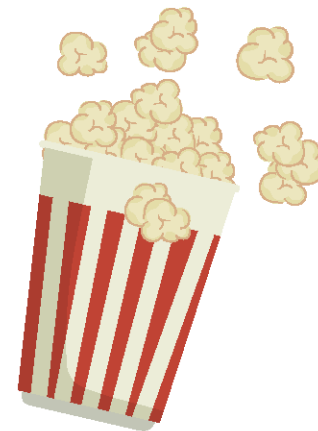
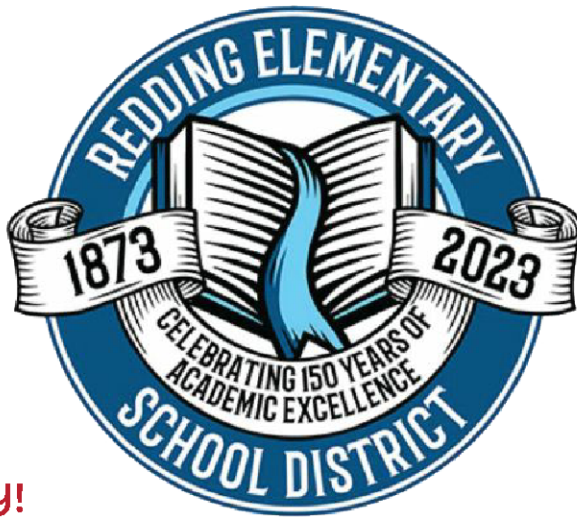
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**On the Cover:** From tiny steps to big adventures, Mom Jillian and daughters Sonora and Ayla, along with their dad, Joseph, are enjoying growing together and operating Mill Creek Resort in Mineral.

**Cover Photography:** Photographer Sarah Peracchino grew up in Redding and became obsessed with photography at eight years old when she found her grandfather's camera in a closet. Sarah loves freezing moments in time and having the opportunity to relive the memories again and again. She has a deep love of documenting that wonderful thing called Motherhood. @sarahperacchinophotography sarahpericchinophotography.com

**DEAR READERS**

Welcome to our April edition. Happy spring! We are grateful for our readership and we value working together with many local organizations who understand that childhood should be filled with wonder and children should experience plenty of active playtime, inspiring young creative thinkers. Education is key to children's success throughout life, especially when it's delivered by caring and supportive individuals.

Spring is a wonderful time of year, filled with growth and possibilities. My garden is showing me this more and more with many plants coming to life after a winter's rest. And just like the plants popping up all over outside, our April issue will offer little buds of knowledge, especially for parents of babies and toddlers.

Spring also means the opportunity to attend National Week of The Young Child events in many locations. Consult our informative and popular family calendar if you'd like to gain more understanding of these fun, free, annual family events where children are honored. You will also find hundreds of other special events including Earth Day happenings and more inside our calendar! We hope to meet you this season at one or more of these exciting community events.

*Pamela & the North State Parent team*



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# Be The Change – Neel Bulchandani

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The mission of our be the change column is to feature community members from the North State who are actively making a difference in community life as it related to children and youth. If you would like to nominate someone who is making a difference, please write to [pn@northstateparent.com](mailto:pn@northstateparent.com).

When his brother sustained a back injury in high school, it changed Neel Bulchandani's life. At the time, Neel was working in a lab and feeling less than enthused about his career. When a few visits to a chiropractor spared his brother from surgery, Neel found himself intrigued by the chiropractic approach to healing as a philosophy, science and art. "It was different from what I had expected healing to be, but it made sense to me," he recalls. When chiropractic adjustments dramatically improved Neel's own asthma condition, his fascination grew. A few months later, Neel began his first classes at Palmer Chiropractic College in Davenport, Iowa, on his way to becoming a chiropractor.

**INTEGRATIVE CARE CONSIDERS THE WHOLE PATIENT**

Today, as an integrative practitioner in Redding, Neel compassionately considers how his patients' physical, emotional, social, mental and spiritual environments affect their health. "If I can't find a physical issue, then if I can find out more about what's underneath and we can explore what's at the root of what they're going through, then we can get further along in their healing," Neel says. Patients come to him at all ages and with a wide variety of physical ailments, from body misalignment to breathing and airway issues. But Neel's main focus, he says, "is helping families."

**CHIROPRACTIC CARE FROM CONCEPTION TO POSTPARTUM AND NURSING**

Neel's work with families can begin with a woman's fertility journey, as he helps to holistically evaluate if something in her environment might be interfering with hormone function. For expecting mothers, Neel's chiropractic alignment can ease their discomfort and help their developing babies get more nutrients through the umbilical cord. Toward the end of pregnancy, Neel can help reposition breech babies for delivery. After delivery, his integrative bodywork facilitates postpartum healing.

After birth, Neel loves meeting his tiny new patients and helping them with their most important job: feeding! When Neel and his wife's first child, Serenity, was born in 2016, she struggled to nurse due to tongue-tie – a condition in which the tissue connecting the underside of the tongue to the floor of the mouth extends too far toward the tip of the tongue, limiting the ability to lift and use the tongue. This condition can impede a newborn's ability to nurse. Thankfully, a simple procedure called a laser frenectomy can release the tongue and allow babies to feed normally.

Before scheduling the frenectomy that solved the problem for Serenity, Neel learned more about this condition and bodywork that can help alleviate 7▶



Dr. Bulchandani gently assesses newborns for tension in the body and the movement quality of the bones of the head, face and spine, which when restricted can tighten the mouth and intensify feeding issues.





Dr. Bulchandani demonstrates his infant bodywork techniques for birth-related health care practitioners to help guide them in their practices.

its symptoms. This experience expanded his interest in the stomatognathic system (the tissues and organs related to the mouth) and its connections to the rest of the body. Over the years, he has created a tongue-tie map and logged symptoms to alert him to patterns of misalignment. For example, he says, “nine out of ten patients with a tongue-tie also have tighter right psoas (hip flexor) muscles and tighter left trapezius muscles.” Recognizing these patterns helps Neel get to the root of patients’ health issues – even when they have remained undetected by other physicians – and find unexpected routes of healing.

#### DR. BULCHANDANI TAKES PATIENT CARE TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Neel loves collaborating with other medical experts, including dentists Jude Crutchfield and Rachel Barnhart. Neel often prepares patients for tongue-tie releases through various bodywork exercises. Jude, who performs tongue tie release surgeries for some of Neel’s patients, says, “These procedures can be very emotional for parents because it’s their newborn baby and it’s hard for the parents to understand and not let emotion cloud their judgment. Neel is very good at describing the pros and cons of the procedure. His thoroughness really shows his level of care.”

Rachel says Neel “provides such wonderful service to our community. He can provide so much help for families through pregnancy and postpartum and then with the baby. It’s just beyond what a traditional provider would do. Neel really takes it to the next level.”

#### MOMS CAN TRUST THEIR INSTINCTS

Neel emphasizes that parents can trust their instincts in caring for their children. “Moms have this instinct to care for their baby,” he says. “Sometimes they hear contradicting wisdom from health care providers. I want them to realize they’re the ones who are carrying this baby and they have intimate knowledge of what this baby needs.”

#### NEW EMBRYOLOGI PODCAST FEATURES A VARIETY OF HEALERS

Neel and his wife, Dawn, have three children: Serenity, 7; Cypress, 5; and Zephyr, 3. Neel and Dawn met through mutual friends and fell in love over “a discussion on the beauty of sound and miracles.” The family loves listening to music and podcasts together and Neel has recently launched a podcast called Embryoloji. “The name is a nod to my east-Indian heritage,” he says and the content – featuring healers of various backgrounds – honors parents and the fact that all people started life as embryos.

As he works with families in the North State, Neel gives patients of all ages this encouragement: “Know yourself. Take moments to be aware of what gives you thankfulness, joy and passion. Cultivate those qualities and the more you build that awareness of what inspires you, you’ll spill this out onto those around you.” ■



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.

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# High Five for North State's First 5s!

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Wendy Dickens, executive director of First 5 Shasta shares literacy enrichment at Mt. Calvary Christian Academy in Redding.

**W**eek of the Young Child stretches from April 6 to the 12, this year. To celebrate this week devoted to raising awareness of the developmental needs of young children, we reached out to First 5 chapters in the North State to learn about what they're doing to support local families with young children.

## WHAT IS FIRST 5?

The First 5 Association of California is an organization devoted to the care of children up to five years old, as well as the support of their parents, caretakers and care providers. First 5 works to ensure the health and success of children in those early years of development by building strong relationships with the community, establishing a network of care and providing parents and

guardians with the skills and support to tackle anything that comes their way. The First 5 Association is made up of members from the County First 5 Commissions.

"All First 5s point to a similar North Star, making the community a place where children and young families can thrive," says Heidi Mendenhall, executive director of First 5 Tehama. "We all know the critical importance of healthy, prosperous communities," says Karen Pautz, who has been the executive director of First 5 Siskiyou for the past 20 years. "And the No. 1 indicator of a healthy community is how the community offers support, nurturing and care for families - placing children first, and also caring for teachers. That's what First 5 is about."

## WHO DOES FIRST 5 HELP?

While many of the First 5 commissions work in tandem with resource organizations such as WIC and local food banks, they have a commitment to help all families and children, regardless of financial status. Each county commission utilizes a strategic plan to identify local needs and allocates their funding accordingly, but they all work to knit a strong support system for everyone under their umbrella.

The First 5s of the North State have support systems woven throughout the community and work interconnectedly to provide the best outcomes possible for young children. While each county commission does a few things a little differently, they have core values in common. "One of the programs we all have a through-line on is called Help Me Grow," Heidi says.

## HELP ME GROW HELPS CARERS IDENTIFY YOUNG CHILDREN'S NEEDS

The Help Me Grow program extends from the county level all the way to Help Me Grow National. "The idea behind Help Me Grow is that parents, community and health care workers all need to be screening young children to identify their developmental phases and needs as early as possible. And we need to have consistent shared screening data so we can support these children," Heidi says. To meet this goal, they've 9►

Karen Pautz, executive director of First 5 Siskiyou, leads parenting and other supportive classes for parents and teachers at local Community Resource Centers.





provided the Ages and Stages Questionnaire a simple online screening tool to help assess your tiny tots. The tool can be accessed through First 5 websites (listed below). The goal of this 15-minute survey is to help get your child to the next stage or identify if there's an area where they might need more support, as in the case of a disability or special need.

- [First 5 Butte](#)
- [First 5 Shasta](#)
- [First 5 Siskiyou](#)
- [First 5 Tehama](#)

"The program is built on the notion that the earlier you get support, the more likely you are to mitigate any issues becoming a lifelong delay or disability," says Heidi. The research indicates that catching an issue by the age of three leads to the best outcomes.

**FIRST 5 OFFERS A MULTITUDE OF SUPPORT SERVICES**

First 5 assists young families and their support teams in a number of ways. They work closely with [Mothers Strong](#), a coalition devoted to helping people suffering with mental health challenges, so that they can heal and become the parents they long to be. As Anna Bauer, executive director of First 5 Butte, says, "It's really important to uncouple the stigma from mental health struggles like postpartum depression."

In addition to Mothers Strong, First 5 supports many organizations and groups including those for guardians raising children and divorced families rebuilding.

First 5 also does the legwork to make finding the help parents need a lot less overwhelming. By acting as a liaison between a child's carer and service provider, medical and mental health providers, educational materials and other forms of community support, they simplify the process. And they even coordinate home visits, connecting families with providers who speak their native language. Currently, there are providers who speak English, Spanish and Hmong among other languages, with more being added.

10 ►



Georgia St. Louis (left) and Anna Bauer, executive director of First 5 Butte (right), attend various community events, including the Growing Healthy Children Walk & Run (pictured).

# 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.



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#### FIRST 5 IS A JUDGMENT-FREE ZONE.

One continuing theme throughout the North State First 5 chapters is the importance of offering outreach and support with compassion and no judgment. "It's about ensuring that parents are supported in their most important work, which is raising healthy children," says Karen. "We see ourselves as servant leaders and bridge builders with organizations and community service clubs. Anyone who wants to work together, we embrace with open arms. We are here to be a resource and support to our partners. Together, everyone achieves more; which really is the foundation for transformative teamwork."

It isn't always easy as a parent or guardian (especially a new one) to navigate the challenges of raising a child. And while every carer wants to do the best they can, it can be hard to admit you don't know what to do. Creating safe spaces for people to ask questions and not have all the answers is vital. Karen and her team are dedicated to creating safe spaces for every voice to be heard. "That starts with compassion and care for the people within our organization. It's easy to celebrate successes, but true partnership is when, with that same tone and trust and connection, we talk about the difficult things."

"People have a lot of knowledge," Karen says. "But there is also a lot of new knowledge that they might not know. We honor all that they recognize, know and practice and then we just introduce them to something new that builds their capacity and brings them to a new level." Having a new technique or two at hand adds more tools to a carer's toolbelt, so they have the right one for any given situation.

#### FIVE PROTECTIVE FACTORS OF CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION

Siskiyou's First 5 agency doubles as the local Child Abuse Prevention Council, which allows them to provide services for children up to age 18 and offer tools to prevent child abuse and help support parents toward being their best selves.

Home visits aren't just for mastering skills like bedtime and child development. It's proven to be one of the most potent strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect. With the five protective factors in place, families are less likely to become unhoused, to be in danger or have negative outcomes.

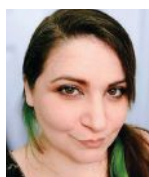
The first factor is making sure carers have access to parenting education programs. The second factor is social connections, helping new parents get out of the isolation that usually results from the life shift that having a child creates. Third is to have concrete support in times of need, such as the First 5 network and family resource centers. Fourth is parental resilience, knowing you can find the support you need and recognizing your own power to bounce back with that support in place. And the last one is the emotional competence children gain from trusting that they will be OK even in times of adversity because they know they're not on an island alone with their struggle.

#### LEARN MORE ABOUT FIRST 5 CHILD AND FAMILY RESOURCES

North State First 5s collaborate to share projects and get the word out to parents about all the resources and support they offer. You can find a wealth of information and resources on their websites, but if you're on the go, you can also listen to their joint podcast on your run or in the car. "Heidi and I do a podcast together called 'Champions for NorCal kids,'" says Wendy Dickens, executive director of First 5 Shasta. "We also invite other First 5 executive directors to come and discuss."

#### YOU CAN HELP MAKE YOUR COMMUNITY BE STRONGER AND MORE RESILIENT

Wendy, who is particularly passionate about childhood literacy, says there are many opportunities to help young children, families and the community at large. "Support young children and their families by providing opportunities for connection and learning. Provide free books to read while in the lobby of your business or as incentives. Provide family-friendly areas or worksite policies. Childcare is a huge issue that impacts the workforce. Businesses can begin to look at family-friendly workplace policies or childcare stipends, etc. Everything we do to support families helps build a stronger community for everyone." ■



As a writer and educator with dyslexia, Brianna Lee Keaney knows from personal experience the effectiveness of early intervention and the struggles children have when their special needs go undiagnosed.



## High 5s for Children

FREE Community Events that celebrate young children to honor National Week of the Young Child. For more family-friendly events, check out the North State Parent [community calendar](#).

### BUTTE COUNTY

#### Valley Oak Children's Services Children's Faire

April 6, 10am-2pm, City Plaza, 132 W 4th St, Chico  
Learn about child friendly businesses and agencies. Enjoy live performances and plenty of engaging activities. Be sure you and your child are dressed for messy fun. Stop by the North State Parent booth to enter a raffle and win valuable prizes. We'd love to meet you!  
Info: (530) 895-3572.

#### The Yellow Door Chico Walks for Autism

April 10, walk starts at 8:30 am at Bidwell Park One-Mile Recreation Area  
3-mile walk, live DJ, carnival, food trucks and a family carnival and vendor fair hosted in partnership with Little Red Hen.  
[Click here](#) to get tickets.

### SHASTA COUNTY

#### The Big Race

April 6, 10am-2pm. Kiwanis Field #1 (KI), west of the Redding Library  
Children and their guardians work together to design, build and decorate their cardboard vehicle. Families can either bring their pre-made race vehicle or build one the day of the event with supplies provided. All participants will receive a trophy and goodie bag for racing.  
Info: Bryan Fraser, [redning2030@gmail.com](mailto:redning2030@gmail.com)

#### Pizza Family Fun Night Fundraiser and Membership Drive

California Cascade Association for the Education of Young Children.  
April 10, 5-8pm  
Hosted simultaneously at two separate locations:  
Redding: Round Table Pizza, Mt. Shasta Mall, 900 Dana Dr., Suite A15. (530) 223-1975  
Anderson: Players Pizza, 2305 Balls Ferry Rd. (530) 365-5473.  
Support your local Association for the Education of Young Children, learn about their advocacy work and become a member.  
Contact: [teacherjula@gmail.com](mailto:teacherjula@gmail.com)

#### Airports for Autism

April 20, 8am-12pm, Benton Airpark, 2600 Gold St., Redding  
A fun annual community event to help raise awareness for autism spectrum disorders and other disabilities. Includes a 5K Race and 2 Mile Fun Walk run down Benton Airpark's runway, silent auction and community fair. To avoid long lines at registration, register online at [AirportsForAutism.com](http://AirportsForAutism.com).

### SISKIYOU COUNTY

#### 9th Annual Kids Day Festival

April 20, 10am-2pm, Bell Air Park, Weed  
Free family event. Bounce houses, magic show, live music, children's activities and games, face painting, food, drink and local vendors. Stop by the North State Parent booth to enter raffle and win valuable prizes. We'd love to meet you! Info: Steven Bryan (530)926-1400.

### TEHAMA COUNTY

#### 38th Annual Children's Fair

May 11, 9:30am-12:30pm, High Point Assembly, 625 Luther Rd, Red Bluff  
Free family event. Hands-on activities for kids and much more. Stop by the North State Parent booth to learn how to make inexpensive crafts with your child. [first5tehama.org/events](http://first5tehama.org/events) for more info.



Heidi Mendenhall, executive director for First 5 Tehama and former preschool teacher, spends time at Red Bluff library sharing the gift that libraries are for families and local communities.



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# BOOST BABY'S Brain Power

One of the most important ways to boost your child's brain development is to make them feel safe and loved.

Photo by Kimberly Parodi

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ENLARGED  
ARTICLE



**Y**our baby's brain grows faster from birth to five years old than any other time in their life. Each day they are discovering how the world works, understanding both verbal and nonverbal communication, learning both fine and gross motor skills, how their bodies work and how they relate to others around them. As parents, we want to create a nurturing environment that can help encourage learning and make the baby feel safe and loved. Here are some tips to help boost your baby's brain power.

## TALKING AND SINGING HELPS YOUR BABY DEVELOP LANGUAGE SKILLS

One of the best ways to boost your child's developing language skills is to talk to them. Babies love to hear your voice, listen to the inflections in your tone and watch your facial expressions. Not sure what to say? Talk to your child about the world around them as you explore together. On a walk you can point out the trees and the sky or whether the breeze feels hot or cold. Sing songs or recite nursery rhymes to your child. Heather Lewis, a music teacher and mother of three, suggests incorporating music through singing lullabies and playing music in the car. Stephanie Loux, also a mother of three, says, "I used to sing the alphabet song, recite the Pledge of Allegiance, recite our address and phone number while they were strapped in the stroller on walks or

in the car," says Stephanie Loux, mom of three. You can even use diaper changing time to smile, talk and sing to your child.

## READING TO YOUR CHILD EXPANDS THEIR WORLD

Reading books with your child is a great way to help them learn new things. Bright, colorful books or books with contrasting colors are fun to look at. Point out objects, shapes and colors as you read. Mom and preschool teacher Kara Thomas suggests printing high contrast cards and hanging them by your baby's changing table. Use reading time to snuggle with your child and let them know they are loved. Babies' attention spans are short so don't stress if they quickly lose patience with reading. The act of reading and interacting with them, even for a short time, still makes a difference.

## HEALTHY DIET AND ADEQUATE REST PREPARE BABIES FOR LEARNING

A diet that includes healthy protein, fruits and vegetables is important to fuel your child's growing brain. It's also important to make sure the baby is getting adequate rest both at night and during regular naps. This will help your baby be fresh and ready to take in the world when they wake up.

## FEELING SAFE SUPPORTS BABIES' HEALTHY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

One of the most important ways you can boost your child's brain development is to make them feel safe and loved. "I consoled them and held them whenever they were upset," says Angela Leaver, mom and early childhood education teacher. "I think this helps them form a healthy attachment to their parents." You cannot "spoil" a baby by holding them too much. Physical touch is vital in showing your children that they are loved and safe and helps your baby's brain grow and develop. "Strong social emotional health and attachment provides the foundation for healthy relationships and communication," says Anna Bauer, Executive Director of First 5 Butte County. "Caregivers who consistently respond to their children are setting them up for lifelong success."

## TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF SO YOU CAN TAKE CARE OF YOUR BABY

If you are stressed, angry or sad, your baby will respond to your emotions. Creating a space that is safe for your baby to explore the world around them and experience the highs and lows of their emotions and how to appropriately respond to those feelings is important for your child's development. Take care of your physical and mental health so you can provide the best environment for your child. You can also model 13►





*"Sometimes the littlest things take up the most room in your heart." – Winnie the Pooh*

good communication skills, the importance of reading and other healthy choices that will encourage your child's development.

During the first few years of life, your child is learning to talk, walk and understand how the world works. They also learn that they are loved, cared for and safe. Teresa Marshall, grandmother and postpartum doula, says, "Finger play, action songs like peek-a-boo, reading, tummy time, baby wearing (carrying baby in a body-hugging sling), massage and water play," are just a few ideas parents can incorporate to help babies' brains grow. In a short time, your child will be running, laughing, playing and reading their own books. You can give them a solid foundation by interacting with them and stimulating their already curious minds. ■



Sarah Lyons is a freelance writer and mom of six kids including triplets. She enjoys reading, writing, and spending time outdoors with her family.

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REFLECTIONS OF A  
SPECIAL NEEDS PARENT  
BY JENNIFER ARNOLD

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# The Neurodivergent Spectrum: Recognizing and Appreciating Cognitive Diversity

**I**n the tapestry of humanity, each person brings their own unique set of characteristics and experiences. This includes neurodivergent individuals whose minds dance to rhythms all their own. The concept of neurodiversity acknowledges and celebrates these differences, recognizing that cognitive diversity is not something to be cured or fixed but rather something to be understood and appreciated.

### What does it mean to be neurodivergent?

Have you ever known someone who seems to process information or interact with the world in a way that is different from others? Perhaps they have a heightened sensitivity to stimuli, struggle with social cues or excel at pattern recognition. They may have uncommon interests or struggle to conform to societal norms. These are all characteristics of neurodivergence.

Neurodivergence is a broad term that includes conditions like autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, Tourette syndrome and more. Rather than viewing these conditions as deficits or disorders, the neurodiversity movement frames them as natural variations in the human brain.

### The spectrum of neurodiversity

It's difficult to pinpoint the exact number of neurodivergent people as many go undiagnosed or misdiagnosed, making it difficult to estimate the true prevalence. Neurodiversity isn't a binary or a linear scale

but a multidimensional space where each person's neurocognitive profile can vary widely.

Neurodivergent individuals often experience the world in unique ways. For instance, someone with ASD might have heightened sensory sensitivity, exceptional memory for details or deep knowledge of specific interests. A person with ADHD may have boundless energy and trouble focusing but exhibit remarkable creativity and the ability to think outside the box.

### Recognizing and accepting neurodivergence

Acceptance begins with the understanding that differences in brain functioning are natural and valuable. It's about seeing the person first, not the diagnosis. Recognizing neurodivergence means listening to neurodivergent voices, learning from their experiences and challenging stereotypes and assumptions. Accepting your child's neurodivergence is imperative for their development and well-being because it nurtures an environment where they can thrive on their own terms. When a child feels understood and valued for who they are, it builds a strong foundation of self-esteem and confidence. When kids are accepted for who they are, it allows them to use their strengths and perspectives to contribute to society in meaningful ways.

As a parent to neurodivergent children, I've realized how crucial our role is in paving the way for a more understanding world. Learning about neurodiversity and sharing that knowledge is essential in breaking down misconceptions and reducing stigma.

I've seen the difference it makes when my kids have access to accommodations like a quiet space or the option to use noise-canceling headphones. I've also seen significant growth in both children after we tailored their learning to include things that highlight their strengths and motivate them to learn.

### Celebrating Cognitive Differences

Raising neurodivergent kids isn't easy by any means - each day brings its own set of challenges. Celebrating differences doesn't negate these challenges. It's about shifting the narrative from what they can't do to what they can do extraordinarily well. We celebrate by creating opportunities for them to use their natural abilities in ways that bring them joy and success, giving them the platform to shine in their unique ways.

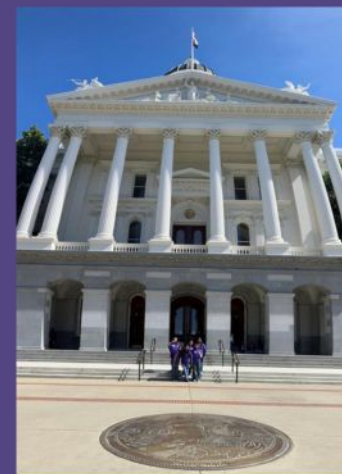
Whether it's their remarkable memory, attention to detail, creative thinking or intense passion for specific subjects, we focus on and value our children's gifts and extraordinary traits. Each of us, with our unique minds and talents, contributes to the world in our own way. By embracing and supporting neurodiversity, we create a more inclusive and compassionate society that benefits all of us. ■



Shasta County author Jennifer Arnold is the mom of four, two of whom have been diagnosed with multiple special needs. She hopes to raise awareness of many issues that parents of special needs children face on a regular basis.



# A DAY AT THE STATE CAPITOL



Tehama County Standing Tall Against Teens Using Substances (STATUS) Youth Coalition had the opportunity to travel to the state capitol and have their voices heard. STATUS Youth Coalition participated in the California Youth Advocacy Network (CYAN) 2024 Youth Quest conference in Sacramento on March 18, 2024. The theme this year was Address the Root Break the Loop.

The goal of Youth Quest is to educate the youth on engaging with state legislators and other decision-makers regarding the detrimental effects of tobacco within their communities. During these sessions, participants had the opportunity to listen, learn, and effectively express their viewpoints.

STATUS youth engaged in a discussion with staff member, Zachary Brown, from the office of California's 3rd State Assembly representative, James Gallagher. The youth conducted themselves in a professional manner while articulating their messages on:

- Youth in rural communities have an increased risk of tobacco use and higher rates of poor mental health.
- Witnessing the new tactics of the tobacco industry firsthand as companies are making, marketing, and selling emerging products to teens.
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Denise Sandez-Rivera



# 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.

## Mike Nichols of Sootheze Therapy Products: *A Hug from Red Bluff to You*

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Spring is upon us and with warmer temperatures and longer days there are sure to be more celebrations ahead—baby showers, bridal showers and birthdays, to name a few. Have you considered an adorable plush, weighted and aromatic animal or a weighted blanket for a gift? It is no longer an assumption that these products are only for people with diagnosable disorders—all people desire to feel comforted and secure. Giving these soothing items to your loved ones is essentially giving them a hug, over and over.

### **Sootheze products bring comfort by appealing to the senses**

Red Bluff’s Mike Nichols, CEO and owner of Sootheze Therapy Products, has long been a caregiver. “People and the desire to help and heal have always been my passion,” Mike says. Sootheze products have been the avenue for Mike to bring comfort to people on a worldwide scale through irresistible plush animals stuffed with a weighty blend of flaxseed and 10 all-natural herbs. The products ease anxiety by appealing to several of our senses. Depending on your needs, these “soothers” can be heated in the microwave or cooled in the freezer. These ingenious products have moved us beyond the days of hot bricks and hot water bottles into a much more convenient and cuddlier experience.

### **Sootheze products born from a desire to help others**

Tehama County residents are famous for their love of animals, so it is fitting that Mike started his friendly and soothing stuffed animal business here. Originally from the bay area, Mike visited friends often in Red Bluff and then finally bought his home there in 2002. With his degree in psychology from Cal Berkeley and his desire to help others, Mike volunteered as a crisis intervention and suicide prevention counselor and worked in construction to, as he put it, “pay off his hefty tuition.”

Soon, Mike was able to fully follow his passion to help people when the opportunity came to partner with an old friend and family member, Harry Nizamian. Harry was known as the father of Garfield as he had been the one to bring a plush Garfield to market in addition to a plush

Snoopy. Harry’s new line of aromatic and therapeutic weighted animals was being sold in spas and gift shops, but Mike had the vision for a new niche. Mike spoke with therapists and counselors at a time when awareness of autism, ADHD, anxiety and sleeplessness was on the rise. In 2015, Mike and Harry launched Sootheze Therapy Products. Mike says, “We attended many professional conferences including the National Play Therapy Association, American Counseling Association and the Preschool, Kindergarten and 1st Grade conference, among many others. We were able to develop a nice following and very loyal customer base.”

### **Supply chain challenges spurs innovative thinking**

The strain on the supply chain during COVID brought new challenges to the company. “It was a tough time,” Mike says. “Especially since I would receive many emails from customers asking for their favorite Sootheze animal and I didn’t have it to give them. Through the years, many therapists and counselors would use our products in their school and in their practice to help ground and soothe their clients and students and they would recommend us to their parents for a way to bring the therapy home. When we couldn’t deliver, it was a very sad time. In the face of potential failure, I decided to switch gears and offer some complimentary products in the educational and therapeutic field 17▶



Inspired by his work as a caregiver, Mike Nichols developed a line of irresistible weighted stuffed animals to help ease anxiety and provide comfort.



Photos by Kimberly Parodi



to help us get our feet back on the ground and rebuild so we could bring back all the favorites and serve our customers as they had been accustomed to.”

**Sootheze products provide relief for anxiety-related symptoms**

The feedback from clinical therapists, parents, the elderly and even college students has been very encouraging. Parents have reported that Sootheze animals make bedtime easier and offer an ingenious way to transition away from pacifiers. Therapists report that the weighted products help with restlessness, anxiousness, insomnia, autism spectrum disorder, sensory input disorder, ADHD, PTSD and more. One therapist who works with survivors of trauma had a teen girl fall asleep holding a “Drooper Sr.” [a heatable, weighted, scented plush dog] while waiting for her mom to finish a parent consultation.



Mailee and Stella cuddle their favorite Sootheze stuffed animals at Dandy Lions in Red Bluff.

“As a mom of twins on the spectrum and a professional who works with children with disabilities, I have seen many sensory products throughout the years. I can say without hesitation that the Sootheze products are of the highest quality and I would recommend them to anyone—parent or professional,” wrote Josephine Blagrave, director of Chico State Autism Clinic. “My boys currently can’t stop playing jungle with the tiger and panda which provide a ton of sensory feedback as they wrestle with them. They have also been great for weighted calming while in the car and at night during bedtime routines. Sootheze has a client for life with our family. Thank you for making such quality products with caring.”

**Helping and healing is challenging and rewarding for Mike Nichols**

Mike feels so fortunate to send out comfort and healing to people worldwide from his home base in Northern California. “The human body and mind are the most interesting things to me,” Mike shares. “I love to learn about people and to meet people. The human connection and hearing people’s stories are the best. Helping and healing are the things that bring me the most joy and fulfillment. I was privileged to be a caregiver for both my father and mother until their passing a few years ago. Although challenging, those were the most rewarding years of my life.”

The loss of Mike’s parents, and then also losing Harry last year, has made Mike even more sympathetic to the needs of his customers—nothing could be more rewarding than to keep offering them comfort and joy in a cuddly package. Locals can find Sootheze Therapy Products at Dandy Lion Children’s Shop in Red Bluff. Everyone can find that special “hug” by visiting the [Sootheze website](#). ■



In the cold season, Kate Hiller has become dependent on her ancient homemade rice bag. Soon to lose its structural integrity, no doubt, Kate looks forward to choosing a Sootheze product to take its place.



Hudson loves his Sootheze Chamois Bear.

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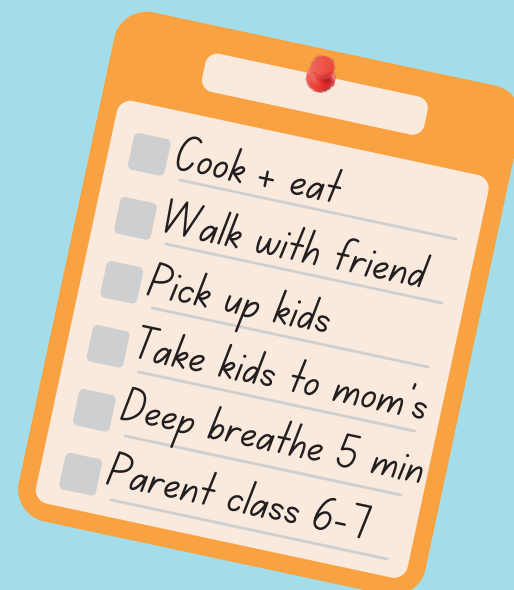


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Shasta County  
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# The Kind of Mother I Am

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It is inevitably my 18-month-old daughter will fall at the park. I will not try to catch her.

On a typical day, my daughter will ingratiate herself with the kids whose mothers thought to bring brightly colored shovels and Fisher-Price dump trucks to the park. I will come over and ask if my daughter can please borrow their toys. Their mother will chirp, “Of course!” She will then turn to her brood. “We’re sharing our toys with the baby!”

I will retreat to my post. I will watch vigilantly for signs that my daughter is about to put a pile of gravel into her mouth or launch a handful of the tiny rocks airborne. I will watch as she explores the playground. And I will watch her take a tumble, the other mother jumping to her rescue before she’s even landed.

“Oh, honey. It’s ok. Your mama’s right here,” she will croon, her eyes searching desperately for the child’s mother, for me. My daughter, now hysterical, will be in this woman’s tentative arms.

I will walk over and take my red-faced child, holding her with her legs wrapped around my waist, her face in my shoulder.

“Thank you so much.” I will say. It is not genuine but it needs to be said. 21►







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“Oh, it’s no problem. I didn’t see exactly what happened, but luckily I was right here.”

“I know, thanks.” I will lie again.

I will return to my perch. My gaze will be fixed on my child but my mind will be fixated on the scene that just played out. In the small act of responding to my daughter’s fall, this other mother has undermined me. She has assumed that the right action was to go with her instinct, to rescue my daughter. And wrapped up in this assumption is the idea that I would have rescued her myself if I had been paying attention. That I would have prevented the fall in the first place if I cared.

I want to tell this woman that I do care. That my aloof exterior belies an infinite reservoir of caring. That she has no idea what kind of mother I am.

I am not the mother who brings a sippy cup of fresh juice and a Tupperware full of cheese cubes and sliced grapes to the park. Random fruit squeeze pouches from our last plane trip litter the bottom of my diaper bag. But this does not make me a bad mother. I trust my child can wait until the next meal to eat again.

I am not the mother who rushes in when my daughter falls. I rarely get into a child-sized playground structure with her. But this does not make me a bad mother. From a distance, I am vigilant. Could her head fit through the slats in that fence? If she fell, how far would the drop be? How soft would the landing be? Is that structure designed for a toddler or a bigger kid? If I don’t need to be next to her, I observe from afar.

It would be so much easier to be by my daughter’s side, holding her hand, spotting her as she climbs her way through the park. Though I ache to protect her from every danger, I force myself to hang back. How will she learn what is safe if I am always protecting her? How will she know how far she can jump if she never falls short?

I want my daughter to love to play for its own sake. I may stand quietly off to the side, but as she zooms down the slide, her mouth open wide in a jubilant smile, my heart rejoices.

This is the kind of mother I am. ■



Pam Moore writes about parenting, health, and fitness for North State Parent, The Washington Post, The Guardian, Time, Outside, Runner’s World, and many others. She’s also a body-positive health coach.

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A young girl with brown hair and blue eyes is smiling at the camera. She is wearing a silver 'BIRTHDAY' tiara. In front of her is a birthday cake with white frosting, chocolate swirls, and a large white candle shaped like the number '8'. Several other lit candles are on the cake. To the right, another girl is partially visible, also smiling. The background is dark with blue bokeh lights. A string of colorful triangular bunting flags is draped across the top of the image.

LOOKING FOR PARTY LOCATION SUGGESTIONS?

VISIT [NORTHSTATEPARENT.COM/BIRTHDAYS](https://www.northstateparent.com/birthdays)



# A BLASTOFF BIRTHDAY BASH

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Children love birthday parties that cater to their special interests and parents often have a lot of fun planning a themed bash. This year, while homing in on a birthday party theme, consider helping your child learn about an inspiring person or historical figure related to their interest and planning a party theme around that interest. You can make memories while fueling their fascination with learning.

## AN ASTRONOMICAL PARTY

Since April is Global Astronomy Month, we thought we'd dive into some stellar party ideas to get your creative party-planning engines humming.

If your kiddo loves learning about the cosmos, there are plenty of heroes in the field. Your budding astronomer might even share a birthday with one of those leading minds. Here are a few of my favorites to give you a place to start.

Neil deGrasse Tyson (born Oct. 5, 1958) is an award-winning astrophysicist, author and science communicator. Director of the Hayden Planetarium, he works to make science approachable. He narrated the acclaimed television documentary series "Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey" and voiced Waddles on Disney's TV show "Gravity Falls."

Nancy Grace Roman (born May 16, 1925) is another award-winning astronomy rockstar. She loved space so much that she started an astronomy club that met weekly when she was only 11 years old. She made exciting discoveries about the speed of stars and became an

executive NASA astronomer.

Ibn Al-Haytham (born July 1, 965) is known as the father of modern optics, experimental physics and scientific methodology. He contributed to those fields and many others, including philosophy.

## HOW TO SET UP A SPACE PARTY

Now that your child has chosen and learned about their favorite figure, how do you throw an astronomy-themed party for your little stargazer? You planet! In all seriousness, birthdays are a great opportunity to nurture a child's curiosity. With a little imagination, you can give your little one a celebration they'll never forget. And if you want to get your budding astronomer hyped, you've got to set the scene.

## HOW TO DECORATE FOR A SPACE BIRTHDAY

With so many options for a perfect party, not even the sky's the limit. Paper cutouts of rockets and moons are a great start, but I love glow-in-the-dark stars. Tape the rockets, moons and glowing stars on different lengths of string and hang them up around the party room. Avoid holes by using Fun-tak to put stars and pictures on the walls. You can find moon lamps or ones that cast the cosmos on your ceiling for under \$20. These or other affordable projectors coupled with blackout curtains turn any home into a planetarium.

If you really want to make the party pop, don't forget the soundtrack. Use spacy instrumentals, sci-fi

themes or your favorite educational songs. For spectacular visuals, try playing Neil deGrasse Tyson's "Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey" in the background.

## WHAT DO YOU SERVE AT A SPACE PARTY?

For sweets, frost your cupcakes in a purple-blue swirl, sprinkling on edible glitter, cake pearls and edible stars. The cake can match or have a galactic glaze. Recipes and instructions abound online, like this one showing [how to make a mirror glaze galaxy cake](#). Add planets with gumballs or a Jupiter jawbreaker. Space cookies are easy since many cookie cutter sets include a star and a circle. A brownie-blondie swirl bakes quickly enough – separate the blondie batter in half, making one blue and the other purple. Combine partially and bake. Add stars and sprinkles for that wow factor.

Rice Krispies, popcorn or cereal balls make great moon rocks. Cantaloupe crescent moons and pineapple stars shine. Mix melon balls with grapes for a bowl-of-planets fruit salad. Try mini marshmallows and pretzel sticks to let children build edible constellations.

Spacy and savory, hummus makes a good moon dip and ranch is a milky way to accompany any veggie platter. Star or rocket shaped pasta makes a great pasta salad. Add vinaigrette, cherry tomato planets, olive black holes and crumbled feta stars to bring some nutrition to the party. Add herbs for a space-thyme salad. And if you're an omnivorous family, spaghetti and meat-eor balls is a fun supper.

24 ►





## A Blastoff Birthday Bash

Fruit-soda is a great way to avoid added sugar without losing joy. Grab a couple of bottles of soda water and various flavors of 100% juice. Tape on labels like Rocket Fuel for the soda water and Orbiting Orange, Blastoff Berry and Planetary Punch for the juices. Kids can invent their own soda. (You can always relabel traditional sodas and punch, too.)

### SPACE PARTY GAMES AND ACTIVITIES

Party games aren't rocket science. Try mixing active games with sit-down activities. Alternating lets kids recoup. Toss-a-ring-on-Saturn is made with any ring toss game and a small enough yellow-brown ball. Gravity Ball is a great indoor or outdoor game. Just blow up a balloon, bat it around and don't let it touch the surface of the moon (your floor). And a relay space race in the yard is another way to burn energy and build memories.

Science fact scavenger hunts will keep little hands busy and minds engaged. And what kid doesn't want to fly to the moon in a cardboard rocket ship? Collect some appliance boxes, supply duct tape and poster markers or paint. Kids can collaborate on a rocket and let their imaginations blast off. And if it's hot out-

side, soaker balls and sprinklers make a super game of meteor showers.

Sit-down activities can give kids something to take home. Print off coloring sheets, crosswords and word finds (which can be found online for free). And educational board games about space are so fun.

Themed parties are a great way to share a passion with the inquisitive little mind(s) in your life. It tells them that they matter in a meaningful way that stays with them and it doesn't have to cost a fortune. Whatever they love, all it takes is a little research and you can help your little one shoot for the moon. You're sure to have a blast. ■



Brianna Lee Keaney is passionate about child education, loves a good theme party and enjoys marrying the two passions to fuel children's imagination.

## Fun Birthday Locations To Visit In The North State

LEARN MORE ABOUT EACH LOCATION:

Athletics Horizons	Rare Air Trampoline Park
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# SISKIYOU COUNTY NEWS

## Earth Day Celebration, Education, Music and More in Mount Shasta

*"If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping in a room with a mosquito." – The Dalai Lama*

Earth Day, celebrated April 22 every year since 1970, reminds us that even small acts like recycling or choosing paper over plastic can make a big difference when added together. We can increase our positive effect on environmental issues by continuing to educate ourselves and our families about the natural environment and the effects our actions have on it.

### MOUNT SHASTA BIOREGIONAL ECOLOGY CENTER'S ANNUAL EARTH DAY FESTIVAL

A wonderful way for families to learn more about our little blue marble and how to preserve the only home is spending Earth Day at one of the North State's longest running and largest Earth Day events, the Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center (MSBEC) [Earth Day Festival](#), April 27 in Mount Shasta City Park.

This free, all-day event is packed with fun and engaging activities and presentations, starting with a water blessing ceremony at 11am. The festival kicks off at noon and goes until 4pm, with activities both outdoor and inside several of the park's historic buildings where festival attendees can learn about local conservation efforts and opportunities at presentations including:

- Patty Grantham, executive director at Siskiyou County Prescribed Burn Association: What it Means to be Fire Wise
- The Pit River Tribe: Why Sáttítla Medicine Lake Highlands should be a National Monument
- Renée Camila, owner of La Yerba Buena Herbs: The Use of Sage and Appropriating Indigenous Native Plants
- Brook M. Thompson, Yurok & Karuk Native & Ph.D. student: Klamath Dam Removal & the Future of Salmon

### FUN AND EDUCATIONAL EARTH DAY ACTIVITIES

Kids will have a blast with the interactive watershed model at the MSBEC Booth and can make and take home crafts created using natural materials courtesy of Regenerative Arts Day Care and Siskiyou County Arts Council. Visitors can wind their way through local exhibitor and craft booths and enjoy delicious food and drink available from local vendors.

Herbalist Cara Saunders of Bear Wallow Herbs will facilitate a 30–45-minute walk along City Park's nature trails. She'll talk about the beneficial uses of native plants in City Park and will invite participants to touch, smell and taste local flora.

26 ▶



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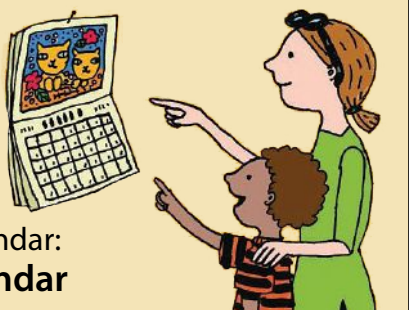
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**NORTH STATE PARENT**  
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[northstateparent.com/calendar](http://northstateparent.com/calendar)





New this year, the eco-art gallery, Conservation Through Creation, will feature artistic creations for sale inspired by stewardship of the earth and composed of recycled, upcycled or natural materials. A portion of proceeds go to support Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center.

CAP EARTH DAY WITH A ROCKIN’ MUSIC CONCERT IN BEAUTIFUL MOUNT SHASTA

A concert fundraiser right next to the park in the beautiful trees at Spring Hill Nursery tops off the day. Doors open at 5pm and the concerts starts at 6pm with Johnny Callahan and Tristan Behm of the Sundown Poachers, followed by the ever-popular bluegrass, americana and cosmic rock ‘n roll band Boot Juice. Tickets are available on the [MSBEC website](#) and at Spring Hill Nursery.

Since 1988, the [Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center](#), a community of people inspired to honor, protect and restore our world-renowned mountain environment, have been making a difference, working to preserve and keep the Mount Shasta bioregion pristine. You can help them continue this vital work by [volunteering](#) in many ways throughout the year. Volunteers are needed at the festival and other events, to help with train maintenance or trail hosting, and for work on fuel reduction, fire resiliency and in the community garden. Local vendors are welcome to [register for a booth](#) at the Earth Day Festival. ■



Stacey Leigh Mohr has been recycling since she was a child when glass had to be separated by color and crushed before being taken to a recycling center. She is thrilled that, due to the consistent efforts of environmental advocates, we can now recycle at the curb and mix recycling materials in the same container.



MSBEC Earth Day in Mount Shasta promises lots of fun activities for kids.

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## Start the Summer Season at the



Students and parents make and sell treats at the Wildflower Music Festival. All proceeds benefit Wildflower Open Classroom



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Summer is just around the corner, with the promise of opportunities to enjoy a bounty of talented musical performers at outdoor music festivals throughout the region. Wildflower Music Festival, one of the first and foremost music festivals in the North State, is a must for families who love good music in a family-friendly atmosphere.

### DANCE TO FOOT-STOMPIN' MUSIC AT WILDFLOWER MUSIC FESTIVAL

Now in its 10th year, this fundraiser for Wildflower Open Classroom Charter School features extraordinary musical artists from around the state. Andy Taylor, who has been curating the music for the festival for the past decade, says, "We want to offer a variety of music and bands to appeal to a wide audience. We

look for diversity in band members as well as a mix of musical styles." This year, Rainbow Girls (a three-piece guitar ensemble performing original soulful tunes with deep, incisive lyrics), Monophonics (psychedelic soul and rhythm and blues) and The Brothers Comatose (high-energy, foot stompin', folk rock and bluegrass) will bring DeGarmo Park in Chico alive and rockin' May 4 from 1-8pm.

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“The festival has grown exponentially every year,” says Colleen Taylor, dedicate school parent and festival co-coordinator with her husband Andy. Their three children have attended Wildflower Open Classroom Charter School since kindergarten. “It started small at the Elks Lodge and grew bigger every year. We’ve held the festival several years at End of Normal at Estes Field. But last year we outgrew that site with over two thousand attendees, so we’ve moved the festival to DeGarmo park.” Colleen, Andy and the 15 or so parents who work together to make the festival successful expect it will be just as popular this year.

WILDFLOWER MUSIC FESTIVAL IS A FAMILY AFFAIR

A truly family-friendly event, the festival features a free kids’ area with face painting, games, activities, jump houses, petting zoo, crafts and more. Bring your lawn chairs, blankets and pop-ups to make the family comfy while enjoying a day of music and fun. There is a water filtration station for drinking water, so bring your water bottles to stay hydrated. A variety of food vendors will offer scrumptious lunch, snacks, dinner and dessert. Best of all, Sierra Nevada will be providing the brews, LaRocca Vineyard the wine, while you dance to the best music Chico has to offer!

Presale tickets are \$55, \$65 day of the event, kids under 12 are free. All proceeds go to support Wildflower Open Classroom, a free K-8 public charter school, which offers a “whole child” approach to education that addresses the academic, social, emotional, creative, aesthetic and physical growth and developmental needs of each student.

WILDFLOWER OPEN CLASSROOM TEACHES CHILDREN THE WAY THEY LEARN BEST

Wildflower strives to create self-motivated,

competent and lifelong learners. They are committed to the celebration of diversity, stewardship of the earth, positive interpersonal relationships, appreciation of the arts and academic excellence. Based on a Waldorf learning model, Wildflower instructors creatively interweave standard school curriculum with thematic, hands-on learning experiences – the way kids learn best.

“The teachers are thinking outside the box,” says Colleen. “Just the other day, the kids were outside with paint and chalk writing their vocabulary words on the sidewalk.” Colleen’s 15-year-old son has attended Wildflower school since kindergarten and is now transitioning successfully to a public high school. “He loves to learn, thanks to his education at Wildflower,” says Colleen. “He’ll take that with him through high school and the rest of his life.”

WILDFLOWER MUSIC FESTIVAL TICKETS AND VOLUNTEERS

“We depend on volunteers to help make this festival run smoothly” says Colleen. Volunteers work in two-hour shifts and receive free admission and a festival T-shirt. [Click here](#) to volunteer. Go to [wildflowermusicfest.com](#) for Wildflower Music Festival information and tickets and [wildflower-school.com](#) for more information on Wildflower Charter School. ■



Stacey Leigh Mohr has been attending rock concerts and music festivals since she was 10 years old when a friend of the family took her to her to see Johnny Cash in concert. She loves attending the local music festivals and looks forward to an exciting summer of festivals and concerts in the North State.



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# Easy Ways Families Can Celebrate EARTH DAY

We all know taking care of the Earth is important, but it's easy to let the busyness of daily life push thoughts of being eco-friendly to the back burner. Being aware of the planet and making small changes is easier than you think.

Earth Day is the perfect opportunity to remind children how to appreciate and take care of our planet. Raising earth-conscious children has never been more important than it is today. The earth provides us with a place to call home, food, water, clothing, shelter and medicine. Fostering a love for our planet helps all of us live longer and healthier lives. And it doesn't have to be overwhelming.

Start small by trying one activity a month or go all in and try all these fun activities with your kids today.

**Plant something:** It can be a lot of fun to plant and grow something together as a family. It doesn't matter if it's a tree, a flower or a seed, when we grow new things it helps the earth. Trees help replenish oxygen and keep the planet cool; flowers can help endangered species like bees; and growing your food helps reduce the impact of food transport on the environment.

**Shop local for your veggies:** Supporting local farms and growers is a great way to keep the earth healthy. The farmers that offer goods at farmers markets often minimize waste compared to conventional grocery stores. Many of them also use fewer harmful chemicals in their growing practices which helps keep the soil and water clean. Plus, you can find tasty new foods for your family to try. Children are much more likely to eat vegetables they choose. Take your kids to a farmers market, give them some money and let them choose and purchase vegetables. Check out the farmers market guide in North State Parent's [Spring/Summer Family Resource Guide](#).

Take your family to an Earth Day event: Local Earth Day festivals and events offer fun family activities that teach us how to think globally and act locally. Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center (MSBEC) sponsors an exciting Earth Day festival every year. Join them April 27 this year in Mount Shasta City Park for a day packed with fun activities for the whole family, including a water blessing ceremony, an eco-art gallery, presentations, eco-art activities, food and craft and craft vendors, a nature walk and more. A benefit concert will be held that evening among the beautiful trees in nearby Spring Hill Nursery. [mountshastaecology.org](#).

**Recycling challenge:** Teach kids to look for recycling symbols on packages to recycle as much as possible. At the end of a week see how much you recycle compared to how much you throw away. Try to get your recycling output to beat your trash output each week.

[Good Housekeeping](#) has a webpage that explains basic recycling symbols and why various items are recycled, as well as how to find out what you can recycle in your municipality. [Recycle Track Systems](#) has charts of recycling symbols and their meanings broken down by material categories.

**Make a recycled craft:** Children love to get creative. Instead of grabbing the usual art supplies, use some of those recycled items to create something. You can have a theme or let everyone create whatever they want. This is a great, earth-friendly rainy-day activity! For inspiration, check out the [We Are Teachers](#) website packed with upcycling craft ideas.

**Give it away:** Instead of tossing things you no longer want or need in the trash, have a household collection day. Once your family gathers a group of items, make a family trip to the local donation center or give things to another family that 30►



There are lots of fun and engaging ways to teach kids to care for the environment. *Photos by Kimberly Parodi.*



could use them. You can even think about younger children who would enjoy playing with toys your kids have outgrown. It can be fun for children to see their favorite playthings being enjoyed by another child.

**Make a birdfeeder:** Gather pinecones or large sticks to use for the feeder. Cover them with a layer of peanut butter and roll in birdseed. Hang outdoors for birds to enjoy.

**Get inspired:** Watch the video of young poet Amanda Gorman reciting her poem, “Earthwise.” Kids and adults will be inspired to treat our planet well.

**Just one thing:** Swap out one plastic item for a more sustainable option from your household each month. Try reusable water bottles, travel mugs, straws, shopping bags or sandwich bags to reduce plastic waste.

**Get outside:** The best way to help children take care of the earth is to fall in love with it. Spending time outside, enjoying the beautiful creatures and landscapes is great for fresh air and exercise as well as learning to love this great big, beautiful planet we call home.

Commit to taking one hike, walk or bike ride each week this year. Make a chart to keep on the fridge to see your progress throughout the year.

“Cycling is a great way to spend time with family (or ‘me time’), get out in the fresh air and get some exercise in the process,” says Rich Colgan, owner of Paradise Bikes. Rich advises parents that every kid should be taught how to ride a bike before they start school.

A map of popular biking trails in the North State can be found in North State Parent’s Spring/Summer Family Resource Guide. For more biking resources check out Shasta Living Streets, Mount Shasta Trail Association and Paradise Bike.

**Leave No Trace:** This is an effort to leave the planet in its most natural state. Do a little research about Leave No Trace and then have a fun family challenge. On your next outing see if you can cover your tracks and leave no trace that you were there. When we are intentional about taking care of the planet, everyone wins! ■



Rebecca Hastings is a writer, wife, and mom of three teens who likes sleeping in, reading great books and eating delicious food.

Whether hiking, camping overnight or enjoying a snack at the park, teaching kids to leave no trace keeps natural places pristine and enjoyable for others and keeps dangerous plastics and waste from harming wildlife.



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