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The Columbian (Vancouver, WA.)

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Correction Appended

Grass roots: Mothers of 'multiples' have a support group

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Raising one child can be hard enough. But raising two at the same time is an entirely different story with its own challenges.

And many mothers of twins have found the advice, support, friendship and networking they need with other mothers of multiples in the Columbia Mothers of Twins Club.

My favorite thing about the club is my friends. I've had these friends longer than any other friends, for 22 years," said Vancouver resident Sandy Pagel, 52, publicity "chairmom" for the group and mother of adult fraternal twin girls.

"I'm past the part of needing advice ... but a lot of people come in with a lot of questions. With 30 women in attendance at meetings, there's never a lack of helpful suggestions."

The group meets the first Thursday each month. Usually there's a social hour for new moms to get oriented, followed by a business meeting and snacks.

Jackie Hill, 38, of Washougal said she likes going to the meetings because others understand her challenges of mothering a boy and girl, age 4 months.

"I can't even go into Wal-Mart (with the children) without people stopping, staring and sharing twins stories in their own families," Hill said. "One time, a woman took my boy out of his stroller. I turned around and she was feeding him."

Other newer moms at the February meeting nodded their heads in agreement as they sat in a circle before the business meeting started. They have all experienced similar encounters with strangers.

Hill had another problem the others could relate to.

"They're fighting for Mom's attention this week. If I pick one up, the other will scream. They're always competing for my attention," Hill said.

Other moms of identical twins shared tips on how to distinguish newborns. One method: paint one child's toenail red.

The local club, founded in 1958, is also associated with the Northwest and national associations of Mothers of Twins Clubs.

Only mothers or guardians of multiple birth children may join. The groups strive to improve public awareness of the needs of multiple-birth children, provide support and information to parents and encourage members to participate in research projects involving twins and/or their families.

"If a teacher wants to separate twins, and the parents think it's in the best interest to keep them together, we will educate the teacher. We feel the parents know their kids the best," Pagel said.

Besides monthly meetings, the group also has holiday childrens parties, nights out for the mothers and couples, "Mom and Me" activities, visits to national conventions, fund-raising events, Mother of the Year awards, newsletters and a library of books full of information about twins. Annual membership fee is \$ 20.

"When you have twins, you get a lot suggestions from people who haven't had twins. That's why joining is so important. Come with concerns and questions," Pagel said.

Grass Roots is a monthly feature in Neighbors that profiles a local community group.

MOTHERS OF TWINS

* To learn more: For more information about the Columbia Mothers of Twins Club, call Sandy Pagel, publicity chairwoman, at 360-571-3318.

* ON THE WEB: Visit www.columbian.com, click on "Our Clark County," click on "Clubs" and click on Columbia Mothers of Twins Club.

ON THE WEB

Other sites about multiple-birth children:

National Organization of Mothers of Twins Clubs: www.nomotc.org

Northwest Association Mothers of Twins Clubs: www.nwamotc.org

The Triplet Connection: www.tripletconnection.org

About.com's Parenting of Multiples: www.multiples.about.com

Twins Magazine: www.twinsmagazine.com

'TAKE PICTURES FIRST'

* "Whether they're identical or fraternal twins, encourage them to be individuals. It will help them when they get older."

Lavonne Harding

* "Don't nurse separately. If you do, you'll be nursing 12 hours a day."

Milisa Trumbo

* "Get out of the house at least once a month with friends without the kids."

Cindy Stieber

* "No matter how much they fight when they're little, remember they will turn around and love each other when they grow up."

Dixie Fuller

* "Make girlfriends. No one understands how "mom" can sometimes be a four-letter word (better than) other mothers of multiples."

Colleen Stewart

* "Getting out with my husband, by ourselves, is very important. It's good to reconnect."

Tina Bump

* "If the children get into mischief, take pictures first. Then clean up the catastrophe."

Donna Forell

* "Make them separate birthday cakes."

Barbara Floyd

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CORRECTION: It is The Columbian's policy to correct errors. Contact Mary Ricks, the information editor, at 360-699-6006.

Columbia Mothers of Twins Club: Sandy Pagel, publicity chairwoman for the group, can be contacted at 360-573-3318. An incorrect phone number appeared in a Neighbors "Grass Roots" story Thursday.

GRAPHIC: Milisa Trumbo, left, and Cindy Stieber have their arms full with twins Adrianna and Isabella, on left, and Jonathan and Matthew. The moms are members of the Columbia Mothers of Twins Club. * Jonathan, left, and Matthew Stieber prove twins can be a handful.

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