

For parents, with love

"Everyone is trying as hard as possible to be a good parent. People deserve to be supported in that."

■ Tracy Meyer

By ANNE CLARK
The Daily Inter Lake

Tracy Meyer and Susan Christofferson paid tribute to their own mothers this week as they opened The Nurturing Center on Kalispell's west side.

The two both grew up in homes with mothers who not only offered good examples of parenting, but who continued their active encouragement into their children's adult lives.

As the women became professionals in human service occupations, they found more and more that the nurturing they experienced was not a common denominator in all families. And they found people anxious to learn the things that they had absorbed as a matter of course.

Meyer, the director of the Child Abuse Prevention Council, and Christofferson, who direct Community Coordinated Child Care, have long had a dream of a center where both parents and children can learn to nurture and be nurtured. Joined by Mary Gibson, who runs the Parentshare organization, they took over the old Lamplighter House at the corner of Second Street West and Third Avenue West.

"Our programs work well together, complement each other," said Meyer. It seemed a good idea to house them together under one convenient roof to provide parents and their children a place to meet, learn, and support one another in the all-important job of being parents.

"We are honoring parenting," said Meyer, "and recognizing the impact it has ... we all certainly pay for it if parents don't do the very best job they can."

The move to create The Nurturing Center comes at a time when more and more people seem willing to seek parenting education, they said.

"We've noticed that the response to parent education classes is tremendous," said Meyer. "Now, when we announce classes, they fill up right away."

People looking for parenting help are a diverse group, she said. "They are single parents and fathers as well as members of two-parent households. There seems to be less

of a stigma about looking for help."

The "menu" of offerings at the center will include parent education classes, parenting nights on specific topics, and support groups.

"And we are inviting parents to stop by, or call with specific questions," said Meyer. "If they need reassurance about how to handle something in their families, or if they want suggestions for positive discipline techniques, we're here. If we don't know the answer, we have additional resources to obtain the help they need."

At The Nurturing Center, child care providers can get training and enroll in the nutritional program for their young charges, and parents can get referrals to child care services.

From there, the Family Friend program will be operated. It matches parents wanting assistance with mothers who volunteer to model parenting techniques.

"We have a lot of expertise under one roof," said Christofferson. "In the future, we see needs expanding into an adolescent program, and we see this center as a limitless, endless source and clearinghouse."

Meyer equates the Nurturing Center's role to that of the Health Promotion Center.

"The message is the same here. There, they say 'Don't wait until you have a heart attack to make a change in your life.' Here, we say there's no sense waiting until you have a problem, or even until you have a child, to learn parenting skills."

The center will offer a parents' night series to introduce people to the center. Meetings are all at 7 p.m., with admission \$2 per person. Child care is available at the center, with advance registration necessary.

On May 15, the topic will be selecting quality child care for infants and toddlers; on May 22, the discussion will be on tools and skills for today's parents; on June 5, Carol Hopwood and Jean Monforton will focus on adolescents; and on June 12, Christofferson will focus on the positive aspects of single parenting.

"I think everyone is trying as hard as possible to be a good parent," said Meyer. "People deserve to be supported in that."

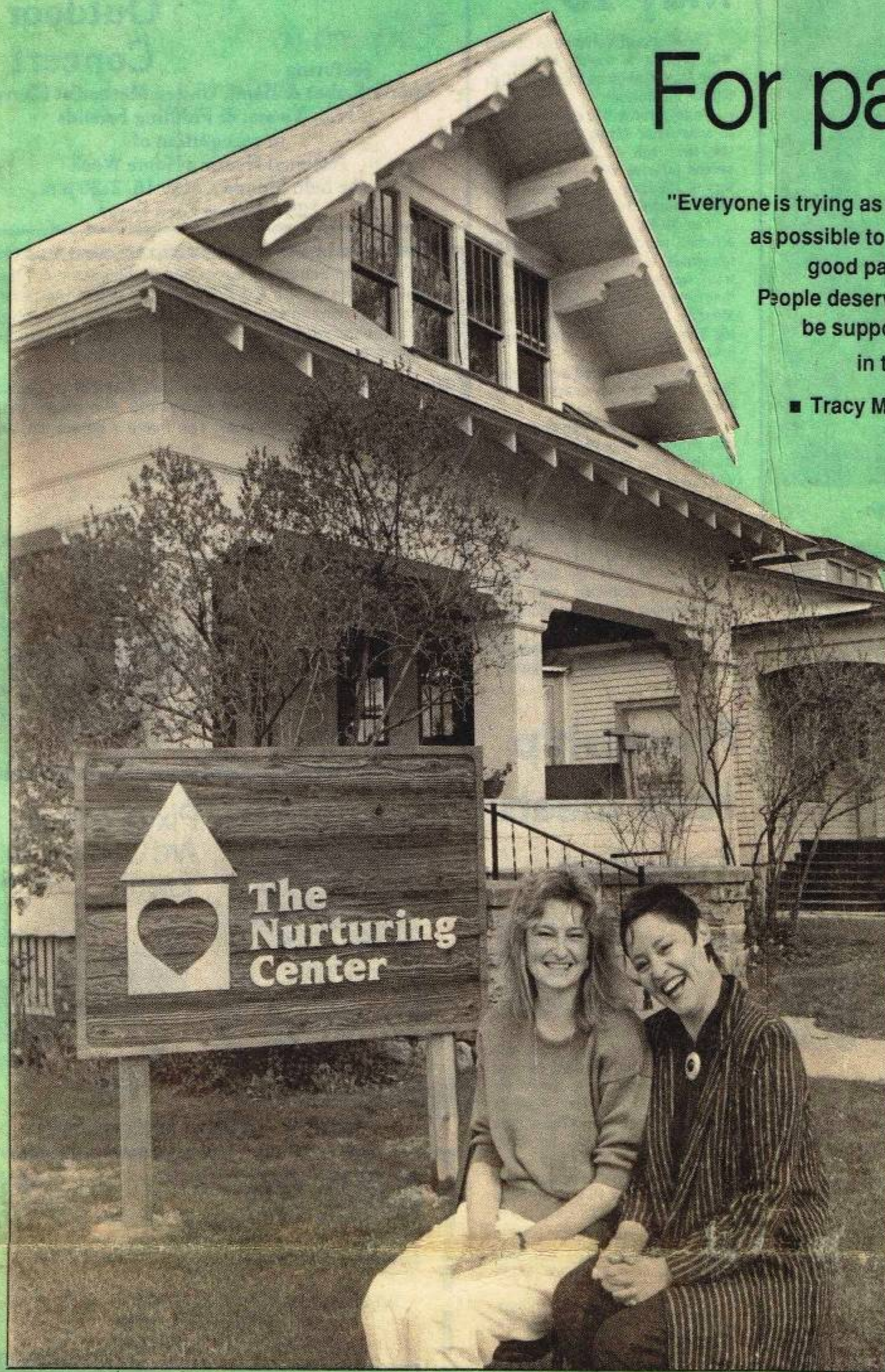


Photo By Sai Skog

TRACY MEYER, left, and Susan Christofferson drew parenting programs together under one roof.