

Making the most of maternity leave: Two Calgary moms write a practical guide book for local parents while juggling feedings and the other minutia of family life

Calgary Herald
Monday, May 1, 2006
Page: B6
Section: Real Life
Byline: Joanne Good
Column: Family Matters
Source: Calgary Herald

Paula McGarrigle and Elena Rhodes met at a Calgary prenatal class and stayed friends after the birth of their sons. They took walks together, starting at local coffee shops with nearby bench stops for breastfeeding.

Along the way, they crafted a guide to everything a parent needs to know, called A **Baby Guide to Calgary: Making the Most of Your Parental Leave** (Playgroup Books, 2006, \$23.95).

McGarrigle, on maternity leave with her second child, says she first thought of the comprehensive book while juggling her firstborn and a fistful of pamphlets collected on visits to vaccination clinics.

From their weekly walks with other moms, the writers also learned of courses, organizations and publications on family travelling, scrapbooking and babyproofing.

"You're taking in all this information, because as first-time moms, that's what you do.

"And then there are all these fun things, like movies you can take your baby to and tips we'd pick up from other moms, like how to fit in a shower in the morning. And I realized there was a world out there that was so supportive of kids and parents. It was liberating," says McGarrigle.

Except that as new parents, McGarrigle and Rhodes are the first to admit they knew more about workplace issues than the world of diapers and pacifiers.

Recent studies indicate more parents are staying home longer with their children and many are older and career-minded, including dads, says McGarrigle, a wind power manager for Shell Canada.

"There's a whole pile of professional women, with more and more doing childbirth between the 35-and-42 age bracket," says McGarrigle, 39.

It's a new ball game, she adds, noting her mathematician husband took two months from his job for their first child. In her research, Rhodes, an actuary, found six per cent of dads take "a leave of some kind," ranging from a week to a year or longer.

But parental leave can be a lonely time when either parent is cut off from the workplace social network and housebound for the first few months, says McGarrigle.

Given their academic and research backgrounds, the authors took a business approach to targeting the

IMAGES



Ted Jacob, Calgary Herald
Calgary mothers Paula McGarrigle, from left, Angela Avery, Pascale Jakobsson and Elena Rhodes enjoy a break with their infants. McGarrigle and Rhodes have crafted a new guide for local parents.

demographic of "mostly moms" for their new guide by assembling a group of parents with the offer of a free lunch.

Once the book was collated, the authors produced digital volumes and solicited additional feedback before the final draft was submitted to a printer.

"We spent 2,500 hours on this book and then hired a fact checker, who logged another 30 hours confirming phone numbers, addresses, business hours and websites of the businesses," says McGarrigle.

The self-published volume features details on local movie screenings with lowered sound, how to organize a parents' club, where to find parenting classes, specialty shops, toy libraries, free activities, child care options, support groups and how to effectively search baby names, apply for employment insurance and child tax benefits and the tricky set up of baby passport photos.

Since McGarrigle describes herself as a "not-so-relaxed" supervisor mommy and Rhodes as more laissez-faire, the moms split their advice giving into Paula's Tips and Elena's Tips, plus tips on dealing with "completely ridiculous advice." This friendly polarity gives the guide its heart.

Still, it's a detailed primer to any service a parent could want, including the authors' favourite neighbourhood walks and a handy timeline of to-do items for a child's first year.

"The really surprising bit we found for the book is that you need to plan child care many months prior to the baby's birth," says McGarrigle, who notes downtown day cares carry one- to two-year waiting lists.

"Equally important, once the baby arrives, is to network with other parents."

The authors say they will update the book in a couple of years and believe it will make a handy gift for grandparents, caregivers and parents of all young families, whether or not they are familiar with this growing city.

"The key thing for any parent on parental leave is that this time goes so fast, and you don't want it to be a blur of diapers, but a wonderful, meaningful time with your baby.

- - -

Tips for parents

- A book launch for A Baby Guide to Calgary will be held Saturday, May 6, from 2 to 4 p.m. at MonkeyShines Childrens Books, 113, 2215 33rd Ave. S.W. For more information, call 542-9463.

- A Baby Guide to Calgary is available at SproutzKidz and Monkeyshines Children's Books or online at www.babyguidetocalgary.com.

Illustration:

• Photo: Ted Jacob, Calgary Herald / Calgary mothers Paula McGarrigle, from left, Angela Avery, Pascale Jakobsson and Elena Rhodes enjoy a break with their infants. McGarrigle and Rhodes have crafted a new guide for local parents.

Idnumber: 200605010055

Edition: Final

Story Type: Column

Note: This story features a factbox "Tips for parents".

Length: 744 words

Illustration Type: Black & White Photo