

Baby booty

Expecting a child? Start saving up!

Competing surveys of the cost of giving birth put the bill at between \$7,600 and \$8,800. The higher number, according to Thomson Healthcare, which summarized more than 43,000 births, included prenatal and postpartum care, as well as drug costs. C-section deliveries bumped up the cost by about \$3,000. Out-of-pocket costs averaged \$483.

Some 4 million babies are born in this country each year.

The lower number, released by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, had a higher out-of-pocket cost for new parents: \$660 after insurance payments.

More than 45,000 babies are born each year in Orange County, as well as in the Inland Empire. Increasingly, the costs associated with young children, such as child care, are escalating faster than incomes. ○



Ripple Kid of the Month

This monthly nomination is about the act of giving back. An Orange County nonprofit, Ripple Kids, Inc., features youths who are changing their community via a "ripple effect."

We ask parents and schools to nominate these contributors, ages 13 and under. Please contact founder Bridget Belden, who blogs about kids making a difference, at: ripplekids.ocfamily.com. This month's selection: Kayla and Connor, 12 and 9, of Tustin. Curious what they've done? Read all about them online. ○



familytech

Eat together

A new website savors family meals

It's dinner time, but no one is at the dinner table. One child has soccer practice while the other has yet to finish his homework. Dad's home late and mom is exhausted from chauffeuring everyone around town. Even if mom made dinner, it may be eaten at different times to accommodate the ever-active family schedule.

GatherRoundTheTable.com is a new website that encourages families to enjoy an evening meal together.

"Families are in such a frenzy today. So many are over-scheduled and I think it really takes a toll on the family," says Nikki Stauffer, a mother of 2 from Grand Rapids, Mich., who is the website's designer and editor. "I want to get across how gathering your family around the table is so important to your children's growth, well-being and future. It's a wonderful source of family time, a way of slowing down and keeping a family in contact during a hectic week."

According to a 2006 study by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University, the more often children and teens eat dinner with their families, the less likely they are to smoke, drink and use drugs. They're more likely to have higher self-esteem and to say their parents believe in them and trust them, according to Stauffer.

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