

# Daily Review

## Kids, dads grateful for this group

**Outdoor activities allow children, fathers chance to bond, give mom the morning off**

By Justine DaCosta

STAFF WRITER

**Wednesday, June 30, 2004** - HAYWARD – After a fast-paced 20-minute uphill walk, a group of local hikers stopped at a vista point at Garin Regional Park earlier this month to take in the panoramic view spanning from the Golden Gate to the Dumbarton bridges.

Aside from the breathtaking seascape, the pause in the three-mile walk allowed the group of about 10 men and their hiking partners a chance to chat.

"Daddy, will you please carry me?" asked Gigi, 3, staring up at her father, Erik Nelson of Castro Valley.

This request is a popular one during outings with the Grateful Dads, a fathers' group that incorporates fatherhood into outdoor activities such as hiking, said Allen Mueller, founder of the group's East Bay chapter.

The trip to Garin Regional Park in Hayward was the chapter's fourth excursion, and so far the benefits have touched father and child alike, Mueller, a Castro Valley resident, said.

The Grateful Dads was formed in 1998 in Marin County by father, artist and musician Jonathan Marks, and now has more than 200 members and chapters in the East Bay and North Bay.

Mueller and his daughter Cassidy, now 4, participated in several hikes with the Marin group, which was the only fathers' group in the area he could find. He recently created an East Bay chapter so that he and other local fathers could share their thoughts on parenting and their appreciation of the outdoors without traveling to Marin.

Most of the fathers are professionals in

their 30s and 40s, and their children range in age from 11 weeks to 8 years old.

John Zelinski and his 3-year-old son, Alex, have gone on almost all of the East Bay hikes. He said the walks give him an opportunity to discuss parenting with other fathers, while both fathers and children exercise and learn about nature.

"It gives them (the children) something to do and burn off their energy, and it gives mama the morning off," Zelinski, a Castro Valley resident, said. "It's a motivation to lose a little weight and get into shape so you're not huffing and puffing in front of your kids."

During the walk, the men talk about life, but not about their jobs, wives or even their favorite new movies. They talk about the best sunscreen for children, the tremendous scenery and where to buy the durable, high-tech backpack baby carriers in which most of the children nestled.

"I put my kid in the Snuggly almost everywhere," Mueller told the group, referring to his new baby, whom he was unable to bring on the hike. "The new ones are so easy

to use."

For Cassidy Mueller, the walks give her a chance to explore the great outdoors with her father and her friend Blacky, a stick horse with electrical tape wrapped around its neck.

"Last time he broke and we had to tape him," Cassidy said.

She said she enjoys the outdoors and, for a clever reason, never gets tired, even on the uphill trails.

"Daddy carries me on his shoulders," she said.

The East Bay chapter of the Grateful Dads will host its next hike Aug. 1 at Tilden Park in Berkeley. Friends and family members are invited to come along.

For further information, contact Allen Mueller at (510) 432-8322 or send e-mail to [amueller@reciinternational.com](mailto:amueller@reciinternational.com) . Visit the Grateful Dads website at [www.gratefuldads.com](http://www.gratefuldads.com)

---

---

Community Connections is a Wednesday feature focusing on organizations or people whose volunteer efforts better their communities. Do you know of an outstanding volunteer or volunteer program? Please send Hayward-area suggestions to city editor Carol Bogart at [cbogart@angnewspapers.com](mailto:cbogart@angnewspapers.com) or call 293-2468. Write us at 22533 Foothill Blvd., Hayward, 94541, or send a fax to (510) 293-2490.

---

---

Justine DaCosta can be reached at (510) 293-2473 or [jdacosta@angnewspapers.com](mailto:jdacosta@angnewspapers.com) .