

## Community: Come Play in Our Playhouses!

The Nurturing Center  
by MARTY PIERSON  
Photos by Alisia Cubberly



**T**here really is a child in all of us. Driving by a tree house may bring back memories of one's secret place from childhood—that place of escape where you ruled the world. It might have been blankets over a card table on a rainy day, or a tent pitched in the backyard. No matter the location, a playhouse was an opportunity to let the imagination soar.

AN INDOOR PLAYHOUSE MADE OF QUILTS, A FIREHOUSE AND A CABOOSE ARE JUST A FEW OF THE SIX CREATIVELY DESIGNED BUILDINGS TO BE FEATURED AT THIS YEAR'S SPRING RAFFLE AND AUCTION, THE ANNUAL DREAMBUILDERS. FOR THE PAST THIRTEEN YEARS, THE NURTURING CENTER HAS BEEN HOLDING THIS EVENT IN KALISPELL. PLAYHOUSES OF ALL SHAPES AND SIZES, GENEROUSLY DONATED BY LOCAL BUSINESSES, HIGH SCHOOLS AND ORGANIZATIONS, TRULY BECOME PLACES OF DREAMS. FUNDS GENERATED FROM THIS RAFFLE AND SILENT AUCTION GO DIRECTLY TO SUPPORT THE NURTURING CENTER.

For those unfamiliar, The Nurturing Center, founded in 1978, is an organization dedicated to family centered support services. Their website, [www.nurturingcenter.org](http://www.nurturingcenter.org), states "The Nurturing Center's goal is to ensure that children are treated with respect and live in safety with secure, healthy relationships." This goal is the basis for the innovative family-oriented education and prevention services they provide to Northwest Montana. Susan Christofferson, one of the founders and the first Executive Director, held a strong belief that families deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Her philosophy is still upheld today. "A child, like a building, needs a strong foundation," stated Eileen Donohue, current Executive Director, "and a strong family helps create that foundation. Strong families then become the foundation of strong communities."

In a nutshell (from a large nut!), The Nurturing Center is a resource for all families. They offer assistance in finding and paying for safe high quality childcare, parenting advice, parenting education and parenting

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and kinship care support groups. More specialized programs address the needs of divorcing parents, mentor teens and make professional development available to child-care providers. Improving early care and education supports a key building block forming the foundation of a child.

While continuing the legacy of Susan Christofferson, The Nurturing Center is moving forward. ParentShare and Kinship Care programs are due for expansion. Economic and societal changes have led to many children living in non-traditional families, or receiving some aspect of childcare from relatives. Children truly do not come with instruction books. Often a child has endured a traumatic experience prior to moving in with relatives. In many cases, the new family is headed by grandparents or someone who has never parented. Questions abound and The Nurturing Center is ready to help.

Gemini, a mentoring program for 9th grade girls, is another slated for growth. Pairing young women with dependable, mature women from the community, this program is dedicated to helping those at a transitional age develop personal and social responsibility. These mentoring relationships build self-confidence. Young women are provided encouragement and support as they create visions for their future, learn about making healthy life choices and expand their horizons through personal growth opportunities. Community volunteers are always needed. The Gemini program will be recruiting this spring and summer prior to the start of the school year. More information on this program is available by contacting The Nurturing Center or visiting their website.

It is difficult to measure this organization's success—it is measured in what didn't occur. How many children didn't end up in foster care or in the juvenile court system? How many teenage pregnancies didn't happen? Still, it is well known that the cost to a community, both financial and human, of letting families fail is huge.

The white house on Third Avenue West is warm and welcoming.

## Come Play.....

This is one of several buildings housing a resource library and friendly staff ready to help. A play area is available for children, so bringing them along is fine. "Just stop in! We are here for every family," emphasized Eileen. "Each family is different and each has different needs. There is no one answer for all families."

"One of my personal goals," continues Eileen, "is to learn more about the needs of families in this area and how we can best serve." Although there is a Citizen's Advisory Board, Eileen spends as much time as possible listening throughout the community. Her energy and enthusiasm guarantee The Nurturing Center will continue to be a valuable resource for years to come.

And, every year, both children and adults will delight in the unique playhouses presented during the DreamBuilders events.

*The Nurturing Center welcomes all families! The Center is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm. You may also contact The Center by telephone or email and, of course, visit their informative website.*

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[www.nurturingcenter.org](http://www.nurturingcenter.org)

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## PETE'S PLAYHOUSE – A Very Special Place!

(picture of Susan and Pete – Courtesy of The Nurturing Center)



In memory of Susan Christofferson, her friends are pleased to contribute the first indoor playhouse to this year's DreamBuilders Playhouse Raffle. Created by local quilter Delphia Blumenthal and named for Susan's grandson Pete, this playhouse is made of reversible panels and fits over a card table. It's portable, washable, storable and a place where dreams and imagination may flourish.

April 17th is a day filled with events at Kalispell Center Mall

All children are invited to join the Parade of Children, sponsored by the Flathead Valley Association for the Education of the Young Child (FAEYC), at 11am. From 11:30am to 1:30pm, children may take part in the fun at special activity booths. Does your child have a favorite costume? Wearing it will just add to the excitement.

At 2pm, the Playhouse Raffle drawings will take place and the winner of the silent auction will be announced. You could win one of the delightful playhouses!

All proceeds from DreamBuilders Playhouse Raffle support the many family centered programs of The Nurturing Center. For additional information regarding raffle tickets and the auction, and to view photographs of this year's playhouses, please visit [www.nurturingcenter.org](http://www.nurturingcenter.org).