

# Susan Christofferson, Nurturing Center Founder, Dies

By **KERIANN LYNCH** of the Beacon

Susan Christofferson, co-founder and executive director of the Nurturing Center and long-time advocate for area children, died last week from complications with cancer. She was 59.

Christofferson started The Nurturing Center in 1978 to provide prevention services that offer support, education and resources to Northwest Montana families. Among the center's many branch programs are childcare referrals and assistance, parenting classes and support groups, divorce education, mentoring, childcare provider training and supervised visitations.

Christofferson's goal was to support and help sustain healthy families, Barbara Calm, president of The Nurturing Center's Board of Directors said. "It was more about prevention than treatment for Susan," she said. "She wanted to prevent the suffering of children and help families before they became dysfunctional."

With her self-effacing and wry sense of humor, Christofferson was able to approach family challenges with the perfect mix of levity and respect, Calm said. The result was a feeling of accessibility that kept the center's users and even Christofferson's coworkers coming back for advice.

"She was all about dignity and treating people with



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Susan Christofferson, executive director of the Nurturing Center.

respect regardless of what their circumstances are," Calm said. "She didn't make you feel bad for needing to ask for help."

Christofferson's daughter Megan Menis said her mother's commitment to early childhood care and public service likely stemmed from her mother and father, an advocate for early childhood education and a

public health educator. Menis, who now operates a Montessori preschool in Seattle, described her mother as an "excellent listener" and "someone who always reserved judgment."

"Her outlook or attitude about life was that if she was awake she'd be doing something – and mostly that was service work in one form or another," Menis said.

Christofferson leaves behind a committed group at The Nurturing Center, Calm said, who will work to continue her legacy in the Flathead. "We're going to keep doing the things she set us in motion doing," she said.

Cards and expressions of support can be sent to the Nurturing Center at 146 Third Ave. W., Kalispell, MT 59901. Per Christofferson's request, a celebration of her life will be held in the spring.

Contributions to the Nurturing Center's Safe Havens Program to continue Christofferson's "dream of supporting families and children" can be sent to the same address. Since a grant expired in late 2007, the Safe Havens program, which provides court-ordered monitored visits between children and a parent, has been struggling to stay financially afloat. Menis said her family feels it's important to continue to promote a program Christofferson felt so passionately about.

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