

# PR firm allows employees to bring their babies to work

*Benefit program eases parents' separation anxiety*

By **Shari Held**  
Special to IBJ

Like many new mothers who want to continue their careers, Jennifer Renfro-Berry faced a dilemma: "How do I trust someone else with my newborn baby?" As she reviewed child care options, her guilt increased.

But unlike many new mothers, Renfro-Berry got lucky—she was able to be with her son, Giovanni, for six months after his birth.

Her employer, Borshoff Johnson Matthews, an Indianapolis-based public relations and marketing communications firm, asked if she would be the guinea pig for the "Bring Your Baby to Work" pilot program.

"I was nervous, because if it didn't work for me, nobody else was going to get to do it," admitted Renfro-Berry, senior art director. "But it was so reassuring, being a first-time mother, to have experienced mothers around. And I got used to being able to work and take care of the baby, quite quickly."

Borshoff initiated the program in January 2000.

"Our program helps ease parents back into the work force after the birth or adoption of an infant," said Susan F. Matthews, a partner with the firm. "It provides a very good transition period for them, and the

employees appreciate it."

"It meant that I could establish a relationship with my child and keep my career going," Renfro-Berry said. "Both are very important to me. It was a lot of work, but it meant so much just to have him there for the first six months, to be able to care for him and interact with him and build that bond. At six months, I was prepared to make the break."

The 6-week-to-6-month time frame of the program is in sync with the developmental process of most children.

"Babies that young aren't mobile, so we don't have child-proofing issues and they don't need to be constantly entertained," Matthews said.

Fathers can also participate in the program, but none have so far.

Borshoff tries to provide participating parents with a private office during the program, but they are required to bring their own supplies and equipment.

"We aren't providing child care," said Matthews, who noted that liability issues influenced this decision.

To participate, both parents must sign a contract releasing the company and other employees from liability. The employee's pay is reduced to compensate for time spent caring for the baby. Either the company or the parent can end the agreement if it isn't working.

Matthews said the most-asked question



*Karen Alter (center) and son, Matthew, participated in Borshoff Johnson Matthews' Bring Your Baby to Work program three years ago. At right is co-worker Beth Millett.*

about the program she receives is, "What about the distractions?" She admitted to having to discourage a few employees from paying too much attention to the babies initially.

"I said, if this is going to work, to be sustainable long-term, we need to have it assimilate and become part of the environment, and it did very quickly."

To minimize her own distractions, Renfro-Berry made other arrangements for Giovanni on days when she had detailed client meetings scheduled.

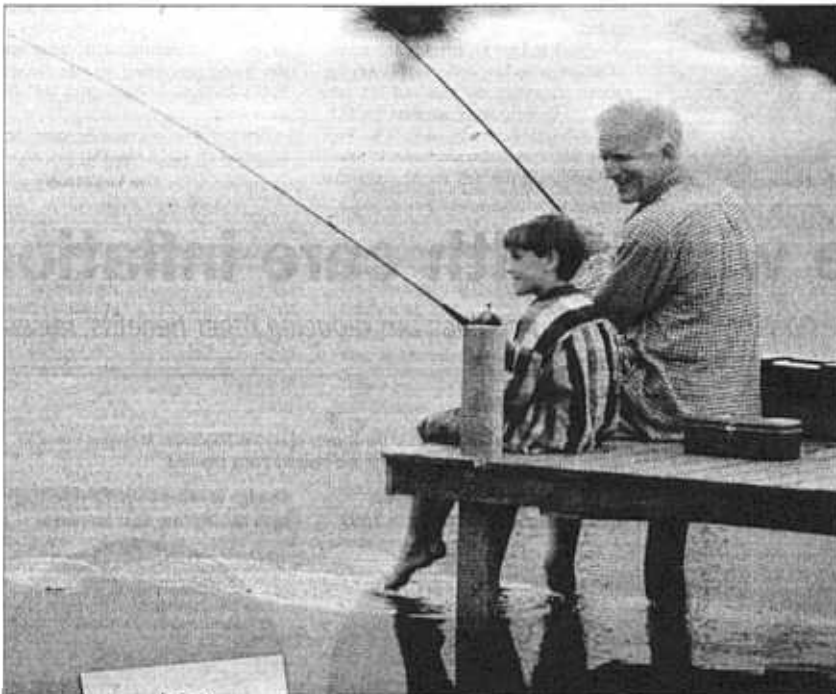
"What this program does is help spark

additional creative spirit," Matthews said. "And it's a little bit different. The employees really appreciate it and it helps with turnover, which, in turn, helps with service."

Karen Alter, vice president at the firm, was the second mother to take advantage of the program. Her son, Matthew, now 3, came to work with her from the end of August to the end of November 2000.

The program gave Alter, a first-time mother with a demanding career, time to decide what path she wanted to follow.

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# Health insurance stocks poised for letdown, analyst says

*Bloomberg News*

Health insurance stocks, including UnitedHealth Group Inc. and Aetna Inc., declined after an analyst cut his rating on the industry, citing concerns about pricing and slowing enrollment.

Charles Boorady, an analyst with Citigroup Inc.'s Smith Barney, lowered the rating on the group to market weight from overweight.

Investors are concerned that health insurers may not be able to raise premiums as much or add as many members as

expected next year unless the U.S. economy expands. Employers aren't adding jobs and are likely to insist on less expensive coverage to control health care costs.

"The slowdown in economic growth eventually had to affect the willingness of companies to negotiate big increases in their health-care premiums," said Michael Obuchowski, who helps oversee about \$500 million at Ashland Management Inc., including shares of UnitedHealth and WellPoint Health Networks Inc.

Health insurers, which roared into 2003 with premium increases of about 15 per-

cent, may be the victim of their own success in curbing medical costs, analysts said.

The industry reported better second quarter profit as health care costs slowed, partly because employers bought coverage that forces workers to pay a bigger share of their medical bills. Patients are buying cheaper generic drugs or waiting before seeing a doctor.

Aetna said its medical costs will rise about 8 percent this year, down from earlier forecasts of 10 percent. Employers will note such statistics as managed-care com-

panies negotiate 2004 rates, Obuchowski said, perhaps cutting into the industry's profit margins.

"You always have new procedures, new drugs, new devices—so the slowing down in premiums is going to be faster than the ability of companies to control those costs," he said. "They're just not going to grow as fast."

Insurers once counted on enrollment growth to help profits, and they are now finding it harder to replace members being lost to job cuts that have hobbled the U.S. economy. •

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## BABIES

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"I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do once he was born," said Alter. "Did I want to continue working? Did I want to stay at home and be a mom? What the program did for me was give me the time to bond with Matthew during the first couple of months and at the same time, balance my workload, clients and career. Once I was here at work with him, I decided that having the best of both worlds was really what I desired."

After Matthew "graduated" from the program, Alter decided to continue working at the firm on a part-time basis.

Kim Vosburg, past president of the Human Resource Association of Central

Indiana and director of human resources for the Gene B. Glick Co., has heard of companies allowing mothers to bring their babies to work to nurse them, but hasn't heard of a program designed to ease parents back into the workplace. Still, he isn't surprised to see such an innovative program with low implementation costs created by a company the size of Borshoff, which has about 25 employees.

"[Smaller employers] often can't compete in the same traditional path as larger employers, so quality CEOs are always looking for ways that might make them different," Vosburg said.

In fact, a program like "Bring Your Baby to Work" may work best in small companies like Borshoff with creative, flexible environments.

"I can't begin to imagine what the logistics of implementing a program like this would be in a large corporation," he said. "And I think it would be absolutely impractical to do in any type of blue-collar environment."

Three mothers and four babies later (Renfro-Berry brought her daughter, Zoe, to work, too), the program has been a success.

In 2002, it received an honor from *Fast Company* magazine and an Innovative Business Award from *Inside Indiana*.

"We knew we were doing the right thing based on the results we had here," Matthews said. "It was an added bonus to get outside recognition." •

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## PATERNITY

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\$8,000 to \$10,000. That's just in direct costs; that's not even in lost productivity or anything else," he said.

He predicted that some form of paid family leave will be legally mandated in the future. "I think we will see paid family leave in this country to some degree—whether it will be 12 weeks or less than 12, full pay or partial pay or some differential, or whether it is financed by the employer or by some kind of tax credits."

For Stank, however, the most important thing was having the opportunity to help his wife when she came home from the hospital, to care for his 3-year-old and to bond with the baby.

"This is a special time in your life" he