

# BETHESDA GAZETTE

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Bill Grandall/GAZETTE

## A group for moms

(Left to right) Joan Wolf-Chiaverini and daughter Leah, age two; Michelle Yost with Tia, age three, and Allie, age five; and Maggie Bryson, with Carter, age two, get together for the Wednesday Morning Group Lecture Series, a program for mothers. On-site babysitting of children is provided for the mothers, who then get to hear interesting, top-notch speakers. Wolf-Chiaverini and Yost are Bethesda residents; Bryson is from Kensington. Story on page A-8.



# Wednesday mothers' group attracts top-notch speakers

by Myra Mensh Patner

Staff Writer

News analyst Cokie Roberts said "yes." So did television news anchor Susan King, novelist Alice McDermott and Leonard Downie, executive editor of *The Washington Post*.

All said "yes" to speaking — without pay — at Bethesda's venerable Wednesday Morning Group, the long-running lecture-cum-baby-sitting program that hundreds of mothers have participated in for almost four decades.

Unpublicized but known by word-of-mouth, the Wednesday Morning Group has met every Wednesday morning, nine months out of every year, at Cedar Lane Unitarian Church since the 1950s. The program starts at 9:30 a.m., when mothers arrive with babies and toddlers in tow. The children are deposited with baby-sitters hired for the occasion, and the mothers head to the conference room, where they chat and drink coffee for a few minutes and then settle down to hear an hour's lecture from some of the big names in the country.

"Basically it's a sanity pill," said Michelle Yost, 30, who has three children under the age of five and has been attending the group for three years. "Even play groups don't give you that kind of peace. You're away from chil-

dren, listening to interesting topics — plus you get a wonderful group of women," said Yost, who worked as a design engineer before marrying, starting a family and moving to the Wyngate neighborhood of Bethesda.

The group is full of well-educated, well-connected women — doctors, nurses, lawyers and engineers — who have taken time off raise their children., said Joan Wolf-Chiaverini, a Bethesda mother of two-year-old Leah and program coordinator for the spring term.

Wolf said many of the mothers or their spouses know people of acclaim and expertise. Those personal connections allow them to lure such people as speakers, even though there is no fee or honorarium.

Reached by phone at her office at National Public Radio, Cokie Roberts said she didn't hesitate for a moment when she was asked to speak last year. "The minute the caller described what the situation was, I accepted," said Roberts, the mother of two grown children.

"I've been a mother at home. I know you don't get respect. This was a group of women who wanted to spend time learning. That was something I admire."

Roberts said she addressed the Wednesday Group in the same way she would have ad-

ressed a business roundtable. "Their questions were excellent. And there was a baby there — that made it fun."

To join the group, each mother pays \$25 per semester, plus \$4 for each lecture. The assembly, which has no religious affiliation with the Cedar Lane church, has used the dues money to buy carpeting for the church and to buy presents for baby-sitters.

No one presently running the group knows who started it or exactly when it began. But it has always been run by volunteers, said Wolf-Chiaverini, who is on maternity leave from her job in real estate.

People learn about the group from other mothers, said Yost, who found out about it from a neighbor shortly after moving to Bethesda.

Among the speakers Wolf-Chiaverini has lined up so far for the spring are the *Post*'s Downie, who speaks on March 15; Susan Holt, former sous chef from Georgetown's 1789 Restaurant, who will demonstrate recipes on April 12; and Susan O'Malley, vice president of the Washington Bullets, who will share her experiences and rise to the top on May 17.

For more information about the Wednesday Morning Group Lecture Series, call Joan Wolf at 365-8860.