

Hundreds gather to hear expert demystify babies' brains

Caretakers zero in on language development

By **Kathy Walsh Nufer**
Post-Crescent staff writer

APPLETON — Sara Woehler dropped off her two young sons at Apple Tree Connections child care center Wednesday evening with another destination in mind.

Woehler, 28, of Menasha, said she and her sister Jenny Woehler, 30, of Appleton, wanted to attend the first installment of the Appleton Education Foundation's Brain to Five community

education series at nearby Appleton North High School and "hear new research" on the brain and how infants and toddlers learn to talk.

"I'm a single parent and my biggest concern for my kids is their speech and how to develop that," she stated.

The Woehler sisters, who both work with young children in child care, joined close to 600 people at North to hear Susan Ellis-Weismer, a leading brain investigator



Ellis-Weismer

with the University of Wisconsin's Waisman Center in Madison, speak about early language development.

"It's a critical time for their brain development and anything we can learn makes us better teachers," said Jenny Woehler.

Four Waisman Center researchers have been slated to share their insights on the shaping of the brain in the first five years of life during the series, which stretches into May. Ellis-Weismer, who has done research on everything from late talkers to language disorders, was the first.

In Wednesday's audi-

Brain to Five speaker series

Upcoming free presentations by Waisman Center brain investigators:

April 2: Jenny Saffran on "How Babies Learn"; 7 p.m. at Appleton North High School auditorium

April 23: Seth David Pollak on "Children's Emotions and the Developing Brain"; 7 p.m. at Appleton North High School auditorium

May 13: Richard Davidson on

ence was Bill Boyle, 63, of Appleton, who has one grandson he watches two days a week and a granddaughter on the way, has plans to see all four speakers.

"Shaping Your Child's Brain"; 7 p.m. at Appleton East High School. (This session was canceled earlier because of bad weather.)

Free child care: Available for parents attending the April 2 and April 23 presentations. Apple Tree Connections at JJ/Edgewood Drive and Providence Avenue is providing the service. Parents must register by calling 920-560-5437.

"I want to learn more about taking care of young children and doing it right," Boyle said, adding that he and his

See **BABIES**, A-6

Neenah strengthens downtown holdings **BABIES: Help for children is available**

Post-Crescent staff

NEENAH – The Common Council on Wednesday sanctioned the purchase of the Rapid Printing property, 228 W. Wisconsin Ave., for downtown redevelopment.

The city's Community Development Authority will buy the property from David and Mary Sales for \$132,000, plus

\$21,000 in relocation benefits.

The purchase and clearance of the property will be funded through the city's land bank.

The acquisition will advance Neenah's efforts to redevelop a one-acre triangle of land bound by W. Wisconsin Avenue, Main Street and W. Doty Avenue.

The city already owns the former Diamond-Vogel site,

110 Main St., and it plans to acquire Glatfelter's engineering building, 232 W. Wisconsin Ave., as part of its purchase of Glatfelter's shuttered paper mill.

Bob Buckingham, Neenah's director of community development and assessment, said the purchase of the Rapid Printing property would be finalized by the end of May.

Flu shots in youth

All children, not just those under 5, should get vaccinated against the flu, a federal advisory panel recommended last week.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices voted to expand annual flu shots to virtually all children except infants younger than 6 months and those with serious egg allergies.

The panel's advice, which is routinely adopted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, means about 30 million more children could be getting vaccinated. If heeded, it would be one of the largest expansions in flu vaccination coverage in U.S. history.

Though they don't tend to get as sick, children ages 5 to 18 get the flu at higher rates than other age groups. Some doctors think giving flu shots to more children may also prevent the illness from spreading to adults, particularly the elderly, who also are at greater risk of getting the flu.

Source: The Associated Press

FLU BUG: One virus missed in vaccine

From A-1

This season, the vaccines missed: Of the three viruses contained in the vaccine, one

From A-2

wife are "blown away" by the rapid rate his grandson is learning language. "He is talking a lot. He has his nursery rhymes down and will sing any song in the book you want."

North seniors Dana Schlefstein, 17, and Tina Ulrich, 18, admitted they attended as a psychology class assignment, but were curious. "I'm intrigued by the idea that children have their own language at an early age," said Schlefstein.

"I've never thought about how children learn to speak before," said Ulrich.

They listened as Ellis-Weismer discussed the neuroplasticity that allows the brain to change and adjust itself through experience. She talked about the critical periods of language development as well as milestones reached as a cooing infant gains a "foothold" in language acquisition and

moves on to play and master the "communication game."

Ellis-Weismer stressed that children don't always reach these milestones at the appointed time. "Don't panic, there's a wide range of variation," she said.

The speaker series is an effort to draw attention to how critical early childhood years are in preparing children to succeed in school.

As parents nurture their child's language development, they have a variety of local resources to tap for information and services, including speech therapy.

Liz Felion, speech and language pathologist with the Outagamie County Early Intervention Program that serves infants and toddlers up to age 3, said she hopes parents pay attention to the "enormous explosion of communication development" in early childhood. "So much of the foundation of

a child's future learning and communication is dependent on the first three years of life."

If a child shows delays in speech and language skills, intervention can help, she said, and parents should call the program for a free screening if they have concerns.

Local school systems offer free developmental screening that can catch problems early. "That is so important because the earlier we find out, the earlier we can intervene with services," said Patti Athanas, who coordinates Appleton Area School District's screening for 3- and 4-year-olds.

"We get a lot of parents with concerns, especially in the area of speech," said Medith Phillips, a retired early childhood teacher who does screening. "Usually we can reassure them their child is in the realm of normal development."

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