

# First 5 Amador program encourages fathers, young children to strengthen connection

Friday, June 13, 2008

By Scott Thomas Anderson ([sanderson@ledger-dispatch.com](mailto:sanderson@ledger-dispatch.com))

As a long-time teacher, Gary Landergen is used to spending time with other peoples' kids - and talking about them, too. But when it comes to spending time with his own little daughter, Keilawnee, the chaos of everyday life can make it tough.

Luckily, First 5 Amador's Dad & Me program is giving local fathers like Landergen a chance to spend fun-filled afternoons with their children, while also talking to other dads about the challenges they face connecting with their young children.

First 5 Amador is an organization that funds programs for children ages 0 to 5. According to Cheri Garamendi, the group's School Readiness Coordinator, a recent study suggested that young children in Amador had a need for more father involvement. "The assessment we did looked at a lot of different aspects of early childhood," she said. "One thing we found was that fathers are sometimes very involved at birth, and then very involved again at about the age of 5 or 6 - but that there can sometimes be a drop off in between."

Garamendi said that when a child reaches the age of 5, many fathers feel like they can get involved more easily through sporting events and other activities. "But zero through 5 are a very critical time in development," she said. "The Dad & Me program is aimed at helping fathers get more engaged during those years, through structured playtimes and activities."

Often held at Amador Cooperative Preschool in Jackson, each Dad & Me day has a theme the afternoon's itinerary is built around. Recent outings have been entitled "Daddy Applesseed," "Harvesting & Hibernating," "Winter Wonders with Dad & Me" and "Look Dad, I'm growing." So far, children and fathers in the program have spent their energy on planting, arts and crafts, water play and an assortment of games.

The program's leader, local father Dave Tearpak, stressed that Dad & Me was open to all adult males who play a prominent role in the life of a young child. "While it's geared to fathers, grandfathers and uncles are also welcomed," explained Tearpak. "The main idea is for children to have a play day with their dads and other men in their lives. There's always art projects, a healthy snack, story time - the basic things you'd get in a preschool environment."

According to Dan Klement, a father who participates in Dad & Me, the afternoons also provide a great chance for fathers to socialize. "The program is a great way to meet other dads, share stories and ideas about your kids, and of course bond with your child," he said. "After spending the day with your child and meeting other dads and their kids, you leave feeling good about your relationship with your child and more connected to a community of people."

For Landergen's daughter, the events have been extremely fun. "Keilawnee still talks about planting a flower at the very first Dad & Me event I took her to," Landergen said. "So far it's been a really enjoyable experience for both of us." Landergen added that having Dad & Me events on the calendar helps keep him focused on the importance of quality time with his daughter. "An event gets planned and you know that's the day you need to be there," he said. "It's good, because with how busy life gets, it's nice to know I've got this time set aside for just me and her."

The next Dad & Me event is July 19. For more information, call First 5 Amador's Cheri Garamendi at 257-1092.



Hannah Mottishaw and her dad, Joel, share a moment before they head down the slide at a Dad & Me event.

Photo by: [Courtesy to the Ledger Dispatch](#)

---

**Scott Thomas Anderson**