

Family Retreats

By Linda Kay

Many families have taken family vacations, but many families have not experienced a family retreat – a time to get away as a family with the purpose of building into their family life – discussing what is important to them, learning new skills and making plans for their future as a family.

Family ROI (Return On Investment) is a new, local non-profit organization that offers such a retreat. Their goal is to help families grow stronger. It is not associated with any religious or political group and respects the diversity in families. Many of the ideas they shared come from the business world.

Families come together for a weekend at a local resort hotel for lectures and activities that focus on communication skills, their family's particular values, culture, and traditions. Everyone in the family is involved in the process. Each family is given a poster-sized map which has a place for their family picture. The family moves down the map's path together throughout the weekend using a wooden doll that they create that represents themselves – a great way to involve the children in the family! There are many hands-on, kid-friendly activities that are not too juvenile for the adults, and yet are captivating for the younger members of the family.

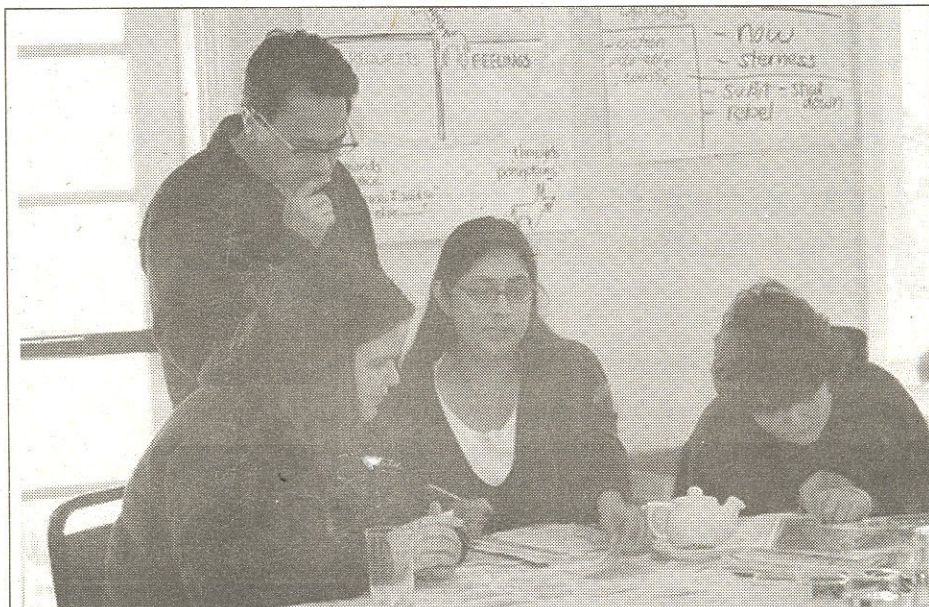
Realizing that children are not wired for lectures, Family ROI offers a Kids Camp for children under 10 years of age to attend when their participation in the family activities is

not required. Children are offered the opportunity to make crafts that go along with what they are learning throughout the weekend. They also have toys and games for the kids to play, along with outdoor fun.

At a recent Family ROI Retreat a variety of families participated. There was a couple looking toward marriage, single parents, blended families, separated families, empty-nesters, and families with one child – one with eight children.

Families go away with new skills, a better understanding of who they are as a family, and agreements as to how they will operate as a family. An example from their board of ideas for traditions entitled "Proud-Parents" says, "To end your child's day on a positive note, ask them at bedtime to share something they did that day of which they are proud. Then, add something else they did that you want to praise. You can praise things that reflect your family values to further reinforce them." At the end of the weekend, Rocco Cappalla, a father of a blended family made up of a two year old, two teenagers and a college student said, "Thank you for one of the best workshops I have ever attended and a HUGE tool for a happy and effective family."

Locally, there are many other opportunities for families to grow together at family camps. Redwood Christian Park and Mount Hermon Christian Conference Center, both located in the Santa Cruz Mountains are faith-based



camps that offer week long Family Camps. Families come from all over the nation. They stay as a family in cabins and hotel-like accommodations. While parents are attending worship services and seminars that focus on a variety of topics in the mornings and evenings, children and teens are involved in their own graded activities and recreation. Afternoons are designed for families to enjoy a variety of activities – swimming, paint ball, archery, ropes courses, climbing walls. . . .

"It's a chance to both relax and to refresh spiritually. It offers lots of activity as well as down-time to talk to friends or just read. It's a great environment where my kids can run and play and I can have confidence that they will be safe," says a mom on an evaluation form.

Scotts Valley based, Family Reiki has the mission to increase awareness and facilitate the use of Reiki – an ancient healing art. Reiki is

taught through storytelling, songs, crafts and movement with the hope of bringing healing to body mind and spirit. Generally Family Reiki offers classes for families but plan to have a family retreat later this spring and another one in the fall.

Perhaps a family retreat that is not only enjoyable but is also beneficial is something you will want to put on your calendar. It is a great investment.



Linda Kay, mother of four, lives in Felton with her husband and two youngest children. She has worked with GUiSC for seven years as an ad representative and occasional writer.