

PARENTING

Events

© **SEP. 22, 23** — **Comedy:** "Ida: Woman Who Runs with the Moose"; presented by Susan Poulin; Bristol Valley Theater, 151 S. Main St., Naples; 8 p.m.; \$14 adults, \$7 children; 716/374-9032, 716/374-6318.

© **SEP. 22, 29** — **Fun Family Fridays:** Strong Museum, One Manhattan Sq., Rochester; 10 a.m.-8 p.m.; \$6 adults, \$5 seniors/students, \$4 children 3-17, under 3 free; 716/263-2702.

© **SAT, SEP. 23** — **Hands-on fun:** "Truckloads of Fun"; board a variety of trucks and large vehicles outside; Strong Museum, One Manhattan Sq., Rochester; 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; \$6 adults, \$5 seniors/students, \$4 children 3-17, under 3 free; 716/263-2702.

© **SAT, SEP. 23** — **Program:** "Into the Deep Blue"; explore the world of marine mammals; McGraw Branch, Irondequoit Public Library, 2180 E. Ridge Rd., Irondequoit; 2 p.m.; 716/336-6060.

© **SEP. 23, 24** — **AppleUmpkin festival:** "Gaslight Village," Rt. 19, Wyoming; 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; for schedule visit Web site www.appleumpkin.com, e-mail appleumpkin@email.com or call 716/495-6220.

© **SEP. 23, 30** — **Make a scarecrow:** bring old clothes; tools, stuffing, pumpkin for head provided; Cumming Nature Center, 6472 Gulick Rd., Naples; 1-3 p.m.; \$3 plus admission; reservations required; 716/374-6160.

© **SUN, SEP. 24** — **Rail excursion:** Fall Foliage Express; from Sodus to Newark; 34-mile, 2-hour round trip; sponsored by Rochester Chapter, National Railway Historical Society; leave from Ontario Midland Railroad's loading area, Rotterdam Rd., 1/2 mi. south of Rt. 104, Sodus; 11 a.m., 2 p.m.; adults \$10, special fare day Sept. 24 children \$3; tickets on sale 10 a.m. day of trip; 716/224-0581.

© **WED, SEP. 27** — **Auditions:** scholarship/dance auditions; Hochstein Music School, 50 N. Plymouth Ave., Rochester; Junior Dance Ensemble ages 12-16; Senior Dance Ensemble ages 13 and older; 7:15 p.m.; 716/454-4596.

© **FRI, SEP. 29** — **Deaf awareness day:** learn through fun activities; Strong Museum, One Manhattan Sq., Rochester; 10 a.m.-2 p.m.; \$6 adults, \$5 seniors/students, \$4 children 3-17, under 3 free; 716/263-2702.

Expert campaigns for breastfeeding

By Kathleen Schwar
Assistant editor

ROCHESTER — When Dr. Ruth A. Lawrence speaks at the national Catholic Medical Association's Oct. 5-8 convention in Pittsburgh, she'll say what she's been saying for years, if not decades: Breastfeeding is the most precious gift a mother can give her child.

In addition, she will mention that even Pope John Paul II has spoken out for breastfeeding — after meeting with her and other researchers in 1995.

At that three-day gathering organized by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, the pope said he understood that in normal circumstances, the benefits of breastfeeding included protection against disease and proper nourishment for children.

"Moreover," he stated, "in addition to these immunological and nutritional effects, this natural way of feeding can create a bond of love and security between mother and child, and enable the child to assert its presence as a person through interaction with the mother."

Although two-thirds of women worldwide were then breastfeeding children to some extent, the practice was decreasing, the pope noted, due to social factors, marketing factors and health-care policies.

It was a high moment for Dr. Lawrence, one of four U.S. lactation experts among the 16 in a working group at the Vatican that week, and one of four Catholics.

Today she continues her campaign to get information to women so they can make their own decisions. Only 65 percent of women leave the hospital breastfeeding their newborn children, she said, and the federal government's goal for this year (which she helped set) had been 75 percent.

"I think women ought to be able to make informed decisions about how to feed their infants," she said in an interview at her office at the University of Rochester Department of Pediatrics at Strong Memorial Hospital.

"Many doctors will not talk about it because it makes the mother feel guilty," she said. "Yet they don't worry about that when they lecture patients about smoking, obesity and high blood pressure. So why would you take that strange position when trying to help a mother make one of the most important decisions about her baby?"

There have been tremendous changes since Dr. Lawrence joined — or helped create — the breastfeeding bandwagon around 1975, however.

When she started her residency at Yale University School of Medicine in 1949-50, about 25 percent of U.S. women were breastfeeding and tended to wean quickly, she said.

Later, she continued, "women wanted to be alert, awake when they delivered." With changes in delivery came a look at breastfeeding, she said. "And we have been ag-



John Powell/Photo intern

Dr. Ruth Lawrence holds a newborn at Strong Memorial Hospital on Sept. 14 in Rochester.

gressively working on it ever since."

The government goals for 2010 are for 75 percent of mothers to leave the hospital breastfeeding their newborns and for 50 percent to still be breastfeeding after six months.

It is probable that 75 percent of women in the Rochester area and in California leave their hospitals breastfeeding their infants, Dr. Lawrence said. But in the Southeast, it's a different story, she said. "Probably 25 percent at best" leave Georgia hospitals breastfeeding, for example.

As part of the various groups Dr. Lawrence works with, "We are targeting the high risk population. Most of the population not breastfeeding are low-income, undereducated women, and their children would probably benefit most — they have more infections, less good nutrition and other problems," she said.

The WIC program (Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants and Children) spends \$800 million a year on formula and only \$8 million on education, she said. Increasing staff education is one goal. By comparison, she noted, the Canadian government pays a mother \$30 a month if she breastfeeds; a case of formula would cost \$80 a month.

Dr. Lawrence also said that formula companies have been trying to discredit breastfeeding because of the risk of transmitting HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

"In the developing world, it would be better to be breastfed by an HIV mother than bottle fed," she maintained, citing high infant mortality statistics, due largely to infections. Mothers use contaminated water to dilute formula, and over-dilute the milk, for example.

Meanwhile, 15 percent of babies fed by HIV-positive mothers might contract AIDS from breastfeeding, she said.

"So the AIDS epidemic has kind of mud-

died the water a little bit," she said.

Even in this country, she said, a large, if not the largest, problem is a woman's lack of a role model or support system. Most significant is whether or not a woman's own mother breastfed her children.

She noted that breastfeeding should not hurt if done correctly, and that nurses and other educators can help a woman tell whether the baby is getting enough milk. And most fears can be put to rest through education, she noted. Yet so often, one or both parents panic over early difficulties and needlessly turn to bottle feeding.

Dr. Lawrence speaks from experience as well as years of research, countless lectures and professional writing. She is author of the "baby" section for World Book Encyclopedia, sections for The Merck Manual, and the book *Breastfeeding: a guide for the medical profession* also printed in Japanese and Spanish, and published in a fifth edition in 1999. She and her husband, Robert, have nine children, all breastfed.

She also has found time to serve on boards for such organizations as St. Bernard's Institute, where she has served for nine years ending this year, and to have been the second president of her parish council at St. Thomas More of Brighton.

She currently is medical director of Strong's Division of Neonatology, which includes responsibility for the newborn nursery. She also runs the Poison Center at the Finger Lakes Regional Poison and Drug Informational Center.

She also remains a consultant on breastfeeding and human lactation to the U.S. Surgeon General's Office and to such other organizations as the state Department of Health, to name just a fraction of her work.

As always, her message about breastfeeding is, "It isn't that it's complicated. It's simple. Babies know what to do. The mothers have to learn."

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