

ALL IN THE Family



JM Lawrence stated, “It’s not what we have in life, but who we have in our life that matters.” This statement could not ring more true for the families—past and present—enrolled in Learning Ladder Family Daycare.

Ten years ago Nancy and Shannon Storkel transformed their rural Valley Junction home into Monroe County’s premier licensed in-home family daycare. Nancy is the owner/provider, although Shannon is a key component to the daycare’s success. Not only is he the Tootsie Roll supplier for good behavior, but he is the creative idea generator, and craftsman, behind many projects. But most importantly, he is a supportive husband.

Nancy’s philosophy on the daycare is simple. “We’re just going to try to have as much fun as we can during the day,” she stated.

The preschool-based program includes story time, singing, dancing, cooking, arts and crafts, tea parties, nature walks, and outdoor play. (Who wouldn’t want to take a turn through a custom outdoor carwash?) Birthdays (including Dr. Seuss’), holidays, and even the winter Olympics are celebrated in Nancy’s own creative way. Over the past decade, 44 children, ages 6 weeks to 6 years, have flourished under Nancy’s nurturing and loving care.

“This is where I am supposed to be!” Nancy grinned. However, having an in-home daycare program was never part of the Storkels’ plan. Nancy worked for 16 years in a

factory before she decided it was time for a career change. Enrolled in AmeriCorps, Nancy split her days between youth organizations, gaining valuable childcare experience and knowledge.

“I really like this,” said Nancy, and that was when she knew she had found her calling in life.

Following her AmeriCorps commitment, Nancy sought employment at a local childcare center. When the owner



Nancy and Shannon Storkel (pictured at the top with their current charges) keep a wall of photos of their extended daycare “family.”



There's always something fun going on at Storkel's Learning Ladder Daycare! Clockwise, starting top left: Enjoying a family-style lunch, taking a turn through the custom car wash, birthdays are always a celebration at Nancy's, planting vegetables with Shannon, on a hunt to find buried treasure!

announced the center's impending closure, families reached out to Nancy to start her own in-home daycare program.

"It was Shannon who said we could do this and gave me the push I needed," Nancy recalled.

The Storkels quickly got to work upending their home. In three short weeks, and after a lot of hard work and sweat equity, Learning Ladder Daycare opened its doors for the first time on June 2, 2008.

Set off of Hwy. 173, and located at the end of a gravel road, is where you will find this hidden gem. A safety sign first alerts guests of children at play, and the Storkels' four-legged family members, KC and Ellie, provide wet greetings. A Little Free Library, also a custom Shannon creation, is situated at the front of the gated entrance, which leads into a cement pad full of bikes, trikes, and scooters. The backyard is a child's dream with vegetable gardens,

barn, swing set, sandbox, an exploration area, and every type of outdoor toy imaginable.

The inside of the Storkels' home has also been redesigned with children in mind. A separate entrance leads downstairs to the cubby station and main activity space for kids to let their imaginations run wild. The walls are painted in warm colors, with fun artwork adorning the walls. Daily routine charts and calendars are posted at kid height. A family photo station is located in the art room, where even more toys, games, and crafts are available and expertly organized. Even Martha Stewart would be impressed with Storkel's organization!

Cleanup is a daily occurrence in which everyone participates. Laminated photos are available for review to ensure everything is put back in its place. Naptime is also a structured process. Before the children head

upstairs for lunch, cots are pulled out from storage and beds prepped. Each child has a personalized set of sheets, pillow, and blanket, all hand sewn by Nancy. Breakfast, lunch, and snack are served daily around the kitchen table. Meals are homemade and presented family-style to teach kids how to serve themselves. "The bigger meal that you can cook, the better the kids will eat," stated Nancy.

Kids also receive an extra-large helping of snuggles, hugs, and high fives daily. "I treat all children as if they were my own," Storkel said.

Family is the key word at Learning Ladder Family Daycare.


When you enroll at Learning Ladder Family Daycare, you become part of Nancy, Shannon, KC, and Ellie's family. To date, 31 families (and counting) are now part of this elite group.

The holidays are a time to get together with those you love and care for

most. For many, this means family, and for Nancy and Shannon it's no different. They welcome all current daycare families into their home and treat them to a home-cooked, hot breakfast. Tables are pushed together so everyone can enjoy a meal together, family-style, of course. Afterwards, the kids sing and dance to Christmas carols, and a jolly man in a red suit makes an appearance. Special gifts are presented to kids and parents.

"My heart is so full when I look around the room and see the excitement on the kids' faces. This really makes Christmas for me," Nancy revealed.

Remember this holiday season to tell those special people in your life how much they mean to you. I will start: My family is so completely grateful for Nancy and Shannon Storkel. You mean the world to us!

Happy Holidays!—*Deana Protz* 



KC and Ellie (inset) help look after the children at Storkels' Learning Ladder Family Daycare.



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Electrical Safety Checklist

Nearly half of all home fires occur during winter months. Take a few minutes to identify and correct any potential electrical hazards to ensure the safety of your home.

SWITCHES AND OUTLETS

- **Are any switches or outlets warm to the touch?** YES NO
Warm switches or outlets indicate an unsafe wiring condition.
- **Are any outlets or switches discolored?** YES NO
Discoloration indicates dangerous heat buildup at these connections.
- **Do plugs fit snugly into outlets?** YES NO
Loose-fitting plugs can cause overheating and fires.

CORDS

- **Are any cords cracked, frayed or damaged?** YES NO
Damaged cords can expose wires, causing shock or fire hazard.
- **Are any cords pinched by furniture or windows, or attached to anything with staples or nails?** YES NO
Pinching and/or stapling cords can damage the insulation, causing shock or fire hazard.
- **Do you use extension cords on a permanent basis?** YES NO
Extension cords should only be used temporarily.

ELECTRIC PANEL

- **Do you have recurring tripped circuit breakers or blown fuses?** YES NO
If yes, this could indicate you're exceeding a safe level of electrical current.
- **Do you have arc fault circuit interrupters (AFCIs)?** YES NO
AFCIs provide greater fire protection. Check your circuit breakers for the AFCI label.



Please note this is not a comprehensive safety checklist. Visit ESFI.org for more information. Source: ESFI



REBATE DEADLINE IS FAST APPROACHING!

If you made some purchases to improve your home's energy efficiency this past year, we may be able to help you save money with a rebate, but you'll need to act quickly: **The deadline for submitting paperwork for rebates is Thursday, December 20!**

Rebates are available for qualified EnergyStar appliances, home heating systems, and lighting. For a complete list of rebates, go to www.oakdalerec.com.



Happy Holidays

from your friends and neighbors at Oakdale Electric Cooperative.

Our office will be closed Monday and Tuesday, December 24 & 25.


Bruce Ardel, General Manager

P.O. Box 40, Oakdale, WI 54649
608-372-4131 • 800-241-2468
info@oakdalerec.com

Deana Protz, Editor



Oakdale Electric Cooperative

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