



Troops return to Iraq after rest at home
Page 2A



St. Mary homeowners have big choices to make
Page 3A

Serving the Grand Lake area since 1848
Celina, Ohio



Brittany Wenning has top day for Celina cross country at Western Buckeye League meet

Monday, October 13, 2003

©2003 Standard Printing Co. All Rights Reserved

50¢

Local fathers organizing to push for more parental rights

By SHELLEY GRIESHOP
sgrieshop@dailystandard.com

Tired of the "deadbeat dad" image and sick of being nothing more than a paycheck to their children, several single fathers told The Daily Standard they believe it's time for a change in the way they're perceived.

"Children need their fathers. Children need real fathers who are involved in their lives, not just some weekend playtime or a quality of life stipend," said Paul Fisher, 26, of Celina, who's never been married and is active almost daily in the life of his 1-year-old toddler.

To change the bias, means to change the system, said Fisher, a computer information technologist. And he's not alone in his sentiments. Dan Moorman, 33, of St. Henry and several other local parents recently organized a local chapter of PACE — Parents And Children for Equality. Although both mothers and fathers are welcome members of the nationwide organization, fathers make up the majority.

'Children need their fathers. Children need real fathers who are involved in their lives, not just some weekend playtime or a quality of life stipend.'

— Paul Fisher of Celina, who is helping form a Parents And Children for Equality chapter

The first meeting for the Mercer County chapter is set for 8 p.m. Thursday in the second floor conference room of the Mercer County Central Services building in Celina. (Use the Sugar Street entrance.) The meeting is open to anyone interested in the rights of parents, Moorman said. Those wishing to hold an office or become

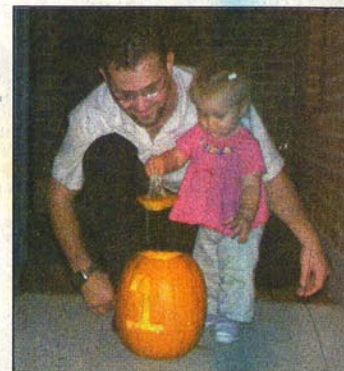
an active member of PACE are asked to arrive at 6 p.m. A second meeting will be held at the same location Nov. 20.

Besides perception, the local fathers say one of the biggest problems they face is the judicial system, specifically the awarding of child custody. PACE members across the state are backing Ohio House Bill 232, which — if passed — will amend and enact three sections of the Ohio Revised Code concerning custody.

House Bill 232 promises "to ensure that court orders and decrees that allocate parental rights and responsibilities with respect to the care of and access to children provide for substantial equality between the parents except where clear and convincing evidence shows that substantial equality would be harmful to the children and to provide for better enforcement of shared parenting orders and decrees."

The custody of children is regularly awarded by the courts to mothers (in more

See FATHERS, back page



Submitted photo

Paul Fisher of Celina and his daughter Demetra place the finishing touches on her first "Birthday Pumpkin" during this past weekend.

Fathers

(Continued from page 1A)

than 90 percent of cases statewide) immediately after a couple separates, the local fathers say. Without declaring either parent fit or unfit, fathers are torn from the daily life of their children by a judge or magistrate who likely never even met them.

Under the Bill of Rights and the Constitution of the United States, parents have a federal right to custody of their children until proven unfit. Michael Galluzzo of St. Paris in Champaign County has taken his case on the issue all the way to federal district court in Dayton where it is currently pending.

"One of the major problems is the attitude of the judicial system and pandering of special interest groups," said Galluzzo, who last year lost a campaign bid for Ohio House of Representatives for the 78th District. "Right now, governments reap huge benefits from the collection of child support at the increasing expense of the taxpayer and parties involved. Will it ever stop?"

Galluzzo's case is unique in that no other state domestic court case on the issue of

parental rights has ever made it to a U.S. federal court. If Galluzzo wins, it would set a precedent and Ohio's law on custody could be declared unconstitutional.

Moorman is separated and the father of two children. He believes a local PACE chapter will be a way for area parents to share ideas, give each other support and, hopefully, make some changes in the way domestic court cases are handled.

"Our goal is to enforce the rights of all parents," Moorman said, adding he intends to bring in judges, attorneys, politicians and other speakers to the monthly meetings.

Some of the issues the group would like to bring to light have to do with child support payments. When a parent takes over full-time care of their child for an extended period such as the summer months, they believe support payments should be transferred to the parent who has physical custody. Currently, support payments do not change.

Moorman, a business owner, said many times parents don't communicate, leaving courts and attorneys to take over. "Then we have an even bigger mess," he added.

The local PACE chapter will not be a "bitch" session, said Fisher, who hopes to contribute to the new group.

"We have no intentions of these meetings being a bashing of judges, women or public services. We are here to solve some very serious issues, which will take very serious commitment and effort," Fisher said.

Fisher said he is continually baffled by what he is learning about the legal system while fighting for custody of his daughter.

"It's like the people who designed this system slept through civics class," he said.

Fisher said Galluzzo's case and his actions are inspirational, comparing him to David fighting Goliath. While his personal goal is to provide the best care for his little girl in the best environment possible, Fisher also believes he must strive to change a flawed system.

"I have spent a good deal of time trying to grasp the logic that the current custody and child support system uses," Fisher said. "I finally understand why it was so hard to comprehend. It is wrong."