

*Things we thought you'd want to know* **front**

“You get a dog to enhance your life, not complicate your life.”  
— Christine Mahaney



**WHAT A DOG**  
Professional dog trainer Christine Mahaney and Toula.

COURTESY CASWELL PHOTOGRAPHY

**WHEN CHRISTINE MAHANEY** signals Toula to “look bored,” the 5-year-old border collie lets out a large yawn.

It’s just one of many tricks Mahaney teaches in *What a Dog*, her professional dog training company. The Plainwell woman works with animals throughout the country and is the local representative for the Paws for Effect studio set

training firm.

“Dogs have always been a passion of mine,” she said. “When my sisters and I were little, they would play with dolls and I would be outside playing with the dogs.”

As a set trainer, Mahaney’s job requires studying scripts and teaching dogs to understand cues. She is working with a bulldog starring in an upcoming

Disney Pixar film being shot in Chicago.

And Toula, who Mahaney rescued from a shelter, appeared in the summer flick, “Public Enemies,” starring Johnny Depp and Christian Bale. One of her biggest challenges was teaching the collie to play dead for a long period while production crews, actors and dozens of on-lookers provided numerous distractions.

Whether working with dogs at home or on a studio set, Mahaney uses compassionate training. “My goal with rescue dogs is to help them learn good behaviors and find a forever home,” she said. “You get a dog to enhance your life, not complicate your life. I train dogs and people to understand one another.”

Toula, who is a certified therapy dog, also does school programs with her owner to teach the message of good behavior and values. If it’s environmental week, for instance, Mahaney will drop a piece of trash and Toula will pick it up and put it in the garbage can.

“It really puts education in an entirely different light for kids,” she said. “When they see a dog acting appropriately, they think ‘Hey, I can do this.’”

For more information, go to [www.whatadog.net](http://www.whatadog.net).

## Street surfing



COURTESY STREET SURFING, LLC

Snowboarding needs snow; surfing requires waves. Luckily, skateboarders get by with cement, balance and a sense of adventure.

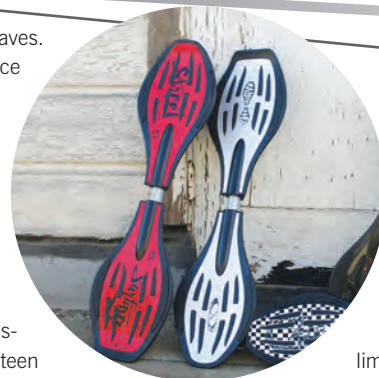
A renewed popularity in skateboarding has sparked interest in all ages for anyone looking for some free-wheeling fun.

“The reason I got into it was that no one really tells you what to do,” said Matt Bueche, who works at Modern Skate and Surf in Centerpointe Mall.

After receiving a skateboard as a Christmas present when he was 8, Bueche found his passion. Fifteen years later, he’s still surfing the streets and getting paid for doing what he loves.

“I don’t have to follow any sort of pattern with skateboarding,” said Bueche. “You can pretty much do your own thing. I really like that.”

Jonathan Scheer, 11, skates a RipStick — a two-wheeled skateboard that requires a combination of feet and hip movements to propel the



board forward. This board won the Outdoor Toy of the Year Award in 2008 and has sold well in local sporting goods stores.

“I have only been skateboarding a few months,” said Scheer. “I saw a couple of people doing it at the YMCA and thought, ‘Wow, that is really cool.’ So I decided to get one and try it out.”

While skateboarding in Michigan may seem to be limited to mild weather, skaters can hone their skills at Modern Skate and Surf during the winter. Along with a skate fee, this indoor private skate park requires parents or legal guardians to sign a safety waiver before kids can surf. The center has membership rates, a skate shop and private lessons.

For more information, visit [www.modernskate.com](http://www.modernskate.com) or call (616) 975-9190 (store) or 975-9150 (park).

# lines

## MOMS TODAY: Picture perfect

She's lived in Paris, London and Los Angeles, schmoozed with celebrities, owns a thriving business, has three beautiful children — and a devoted husband who cooks gourmet meals.

Artistic portrait photographer Annie Rouvillois has it all.

But the road to success wasn't always clear. Warned she wouldn't find work in her field after college, the Grand Rapids native took the closest thing she could find — photographing houses for real estate. Finally, she had the opportunity to travel to London on a short-term work visa, where she met a fashion photographer and his model wife who invited her to work for them.

"I made a fatal mistake of returning home to tell everyone goodbye (and then) was refused re-entry to England," she said. "They said I would be taking a job away from someone there."

Another door opened when her sister married and moved to Los Angeles. Rouvillois followed, taking a job with a foreign press agency.

"I was never a big soap opera watcher, but the foreign press was into it, so I had to be into it," she said about hauling her equipment all over the city to photograph the stars. Rouvillois knew it wasn't her calling. "I had a few colleagues that hid in the bushes, but overall, I was so bad at it. If someone asked me not to take their picture, I would say 'OK.'"

When her sister became pregnant, Rouvillois offered to create a photographic portrait.

"This was the first time I saw another woman pregnant and nude, and I thought it was so interesting that we never see anything in our society like this," she said. Soon after, a very pregnant Demi Moore graced the cover of *Vanity Fair*, and public fascination grew with this type of portraiture. With a longing to return to Europe and a new-found passion, Rouvillois left for Paris, where she met her husband, Lionel. After three years, when they found out she was pregnant, they chose to move to Grand Rapids.

"I never wanted to work a 9-to-5 job," said Rouvillois. "I was too much a hands-on mom, so I started my photography work right away around my family."

Eventually, she opened a shared studio outside her home,



COURTESY JEAN ORIANIS



Annie Rouvillois shoots a pregnancy portrait of Diane Ngabire in her studio. At left, a portrait by Rouvillois of Leslie Farber and her baby, Mia.

and after her pregnancy portrait work garnered local media attention, her career was launched. Scheduling her shoots around her kids, she manages to do it all — but not without help.

"I have a partner who loves my work and helps me so much," Rouvillois gushed about her husband. A project manager for a software design firm, he finds time to do the majority of cooking and household chores.

"My friends say 'Wow, it's so great that you're able to do everything,' but it took a lot of work and help to get where I am," said Rouvillois. "What's most important is living your life to the fullest."

Rouvillois' studio is located at 14 Weston Ave. SE in Grand Rapids. Her portfolio can be viewed at [www.annier.com](http://www.annier.com).

## World Breastfeeding Week

During the first week of August, La Leche League celebrates Breastfeeding: Prepared for Life and the 1990 signing of the "Innocenti Declaration," a global initiative for the protection and promotion of breastfeeding.

For West Michigan moms, this is an opportunity to gain support, training and education on the care and feeding of infants through the healthy, natural process of breastfeeding.

The local La Leche group has been taking their ongoing education efforts outdoors this summer to assist mothers with any breastfeeding issues and concerns.

"Throughout the summer, we are participating in various festivals and at 'Zoo Days,'" explained Rebeca Rodriguez Reyna, leader and co-chair of the La Leche League of Grand Rapids. "We'll have diaper changing and feeding tents where moms can take a break and feed their babies in more privacy."

The Grand Rapids chapter, comprised of five area groups and 18 leaders, plans to reach out to medical providers and clinics during World Breastfeeding Week about their support services, 24-hour hotline and monthly meetings.

"We have community meetings throughout West Michigan, where moms can come and meet and get support," Reyna said. "Our group invites experts in to address topics like the benefits of breastfeeding, bringing baby home, nutrition, weaning, parenting and even child-rearing. We have discussions and answer questions and are ongoing, so moms can come as much as they want."

To contact local chapters of La Leche League call (616) 752-8300 or go to <http://groups.google.com/group/lll-gr>.

For events during World Breastfeeding Week, go to [www.healthykent.org](http://www.healthykent.org) or [www.llusa.org](http://www.llusa.org).