



Gazette photo/BOB ZELLAR

St. John's Lutheran Home employee Sharon Fleming feeds Cameron, her 10-month-old son, at the nursing home's day care center.

# Family friendly workplace

*Some childless workers feel ignored by today's*

By Gazette Staff

At St. John's Lutheran Home in Billings, employees can leave their children at the company's in-house day care. The day care, called the Center for Generations, charges employees \$1.40 an hour per child. Non-employees also can use the center, but the rate is much higher at \$3.50 an hour per child.

"It's a great fringe benefit for our employees," says Linda Price, director of St. John's. Several employees have said the day care perk is exactly why they accepted a job at St. John's. It's also a great thing for the elderly residents of St. John's who enjoy visiting with the children.

The retirement home is among a growing number of companies that has found being friendly to busy workers with families is good business, especially in this country's tight job market.

Along with on-site day care, some companies allow workers to take paid leave to care for sick children. Others allow parents to occasionally bring their children to work, or allow paid time off for parents to volunteer in their child's school. And some compa-

nies provide elaborate parties for the children of employees.

That has left some childless employees resentful.

"I sometimes feel that working parents get away with things: bringing children into work, coming in late because of day care issues, working at home a couple of days a week to save on child care," says one man, a Web designer for a large Minneapolis corporation who didn't want to be identified.

"I think every childless person should be able to take a one-time six-week paid sabbatical to compensate for all the maternity leaves other people take."

Price at St. John's says she has detected no such resentment among childless employees there.

"As far as I know, everyone seems to think it's a great service for everyone involved," she says.

At Conoco, which employs about 300 people in the Billings area, workers are offered all kinds of arrangements that allow time with their families. Employees can work flexible schedules, leave work to attend their children's school functions, work extra hours to take paid days off, and others.

While not all employees are eligible for all benefits, the family-friendly practices are something that the company has felt strongly about for a long time, says John Bennett, Conoco's director of public affairs.

"Conoco is a business. We need to be productive," he says. "At the same time, there is much we can do with workers to meet their needs outside the company without losing productivity."

And each of the company's benefits is available to workers without children, he says.

"They're designed to help people with their personal obligations," he says. "For some that may be family matters, and for others that might be pursuing a degree or working in their community."

Still, there are plenty of childless workers, or parents whose children are grown, who often complain among themselves that their lives get ignored in the rush to create family-friendly workplaces.

Author Elinor Burkett, who describes herself as a loud-mouthed New Yorker, is giving voice to that silent majority. She aims to start a revolution among the millions of working people without small children — some 75 percent of the labor force — who say they are picking up the pieces for parents distracted by their responsibilities at home.

And getting no extra time or money for it.

A former reporter for the Miami Herald, Burkett alternately has been labeled a she-devil and a savior since her book, "The Baby Boon: How Family-Friendly America Cheats the Childless," was published in March.

Feminists have called her a turncoat for saying that having children is a choice, one that often conflicts with a

hard-charging career. Work-family academics say Burkett misses the big picture when she assails tax breaks for middle-class families.

"What Burkett forgets is that most employees will experience times both with and without family commitments," says Bob Drago, an economist and work-family researcher at Penn State University. "If it's not children now, it will be elderly parents later."

Burkett doesn't disagree. Nor does she want parental leaves and other family-friendly benefits rolled back. She does want them redefined, however, so that childless people can take advantage of perks, too.

"Every worker has a right to a life and to have time for that respected by employers," says Burkett, sounding like the very liberals who denounce her. "I might choose to use that time in a way different from you. But 20 years from now, you're going to use that time differently, too."

Burkett is a hero to the childless

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## Best for working mothers

Top companies on Working Mother magazine's annual list:

Company	Years on list
1. Allstate Insurance Co.	10
2. Bank of America Corp.*	2
3. Eli Lilly and Co.	6
4. Fannie Mae	7
5. IBM Corp.	15
6. Life Technologies Inc.	5
7. Lincoln Financial Group	14
8. Merrill Lynch & Co. Inc.	5
9. Novant Health Inc.	1
10. Prudential	11

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