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montana55

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**sandwich
generation**

caring through the years

empty nesting

making the transition
from chaos to quiet

annual **housing
GUIDE**

to senior living in montana



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sandwich generation

caring through the years

Lee Manning's life puts her in the fast-growing Sandwich Generation, but it doesn't get the headlines that Baby Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y draw.

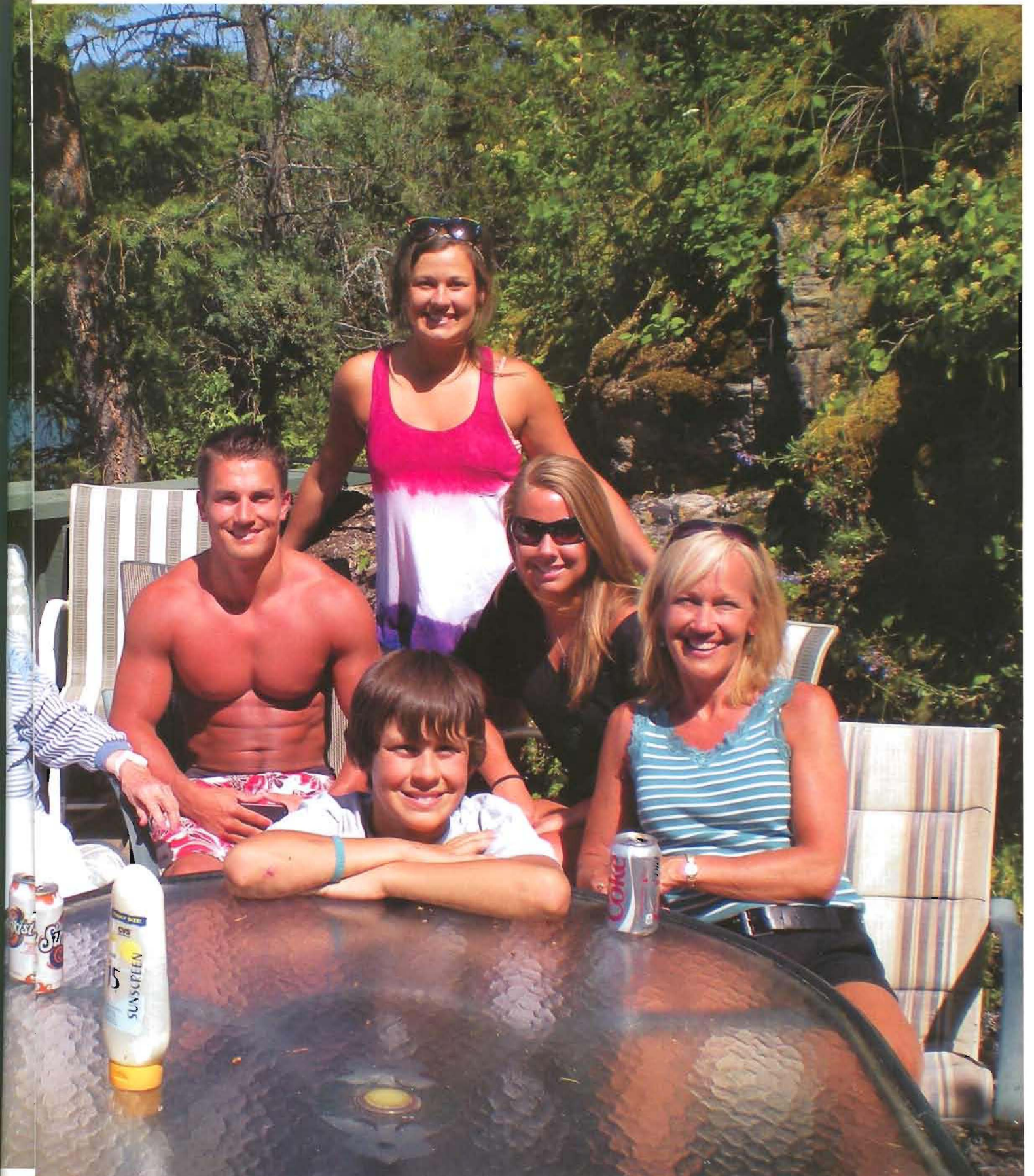
Manning, a chemical laboratory scientist for Bozeman Deaconess Health Group, and her husband, Jim, have four children. Besides raising their youngest, sixth-grader E.J., the Bozeman couple still keeps a close eye on their daughter, Lindsey, a freshman at Vanderbilt University who will return home for the summer. Two older children, John and Katie, are young adults living in Seattle and Bozeman.

The most common care recipient is one's mother.

E.J. MANNING

The Mannings at a family gathering on Flathead Lake in July 2011. L-R: Jim Manning, Kay Murphy, John Manning, Katie Manning, Lindsey Manning, Lee Manning, (foreground).





a generation of people who care for their aging parents while supporting their own children

What makes Lee Manning a Sandwich Generation member is that her caregiving extends upwards as well, to her mother-in-law, Kay Murphy. Murphy, who recently turned 90 and has dementia, lives in an assisted living facility in Bozeman.

"I do quite a bit for her," Manning said. "I take care of every bit of her finances, and all her mail is sent to our house."

Other examples of Manning's caregiving: She keeps her mother-in-law stocked in toiletries, arranges to have Murphy's prescriptions filled and takes the older woman to her doctor's appointments.

Manning and many other Montanans find themselves at a generational crossroad: These busy middle-aged people are providing care to aging parents, and they're also involved in raising adolescent children and activities associated with that – sports events, concerts, school plays, teacher conferences and the like.

Wikipedia defines this segment of the population as "a generation of people who care for their aging parents while supporting their own children."

An estimate of the number of Sandwich Generation individuals in Montana is not available. Yet it's likely

the state's numbers are significant, given Census Bureau projections that Montana will soon have one of the country's oldest populations.

A 2009 study titled "Caregiving in the U.S. - A Focused Look at Those Caring for Someone Age 50 or Older" hints at the size of the Sandwich Generation. The study, sponsored by the American Association of Retired Persons, estimated that at least 43.5 million caregivers, age 18 or over, equivalent to 19 percent of all adults, provide unpaid care to an adult family member who is 50 years old or older. The most common care recipient is one's mother.

The study found that caregivers and care recipients are predominately female and their average ages are 50 and 75, respectively - about two years older than was found in a similar 2004 study.

"It's (Sandwich Generation membership) certainly growing because we're living longer," said Sandy Bailey, family and human development specialist at Montana State University-Bozeman. Montana's aging trend is especially pronounced on the Eastern Plains, where Daniels County is a prime example, she said.

Bailey said a particular challenge for Sandwich Generation members is "they're stretched thin - it's a resource thing. And then there's a lot of emotional stress."

The financial strain of providing care enters the picture, and "a lot of time and energy" is required of family caregivers, she said.

To help manage the pressures that Sandwich Generation members and other caregivers feel, MSU Extension offers a six-week course called "Powerful Tools for Caregivers." Developed in Oregon, the program teaches caregivers to use community resources, stress management techniques and communication tools to take better care of themselves.

Susan Kohler, CEO of Missoula Aging Services, knows about Sandwich Generation challenges from professional and personal experience.

Kohler drove to Spokane monthly to assist two of her sisters in caring for their mother, who lived in an assisted living facility until her death about a year ago. As a single mother raising two adolescents, Kohler had to juggle their needs and her mother's needs.

"There was some resentment that I was gone," she said.

A program in Missoula called Care Solutions can help in situations like hers. It provides for a care manager go into a senior's home and, for a fee, do an assessment and assist with care as needed. This helps with distant care by lessening the number of trips needed. However, "not everyone has that resource in their community," Kohler said.

Manning's caregiving began four years ago when her mother-in-law, then 86, sensed approaching dementia and decided to quit driving. Manning said she's shouldered more caregiver responsibility than her husband because "I have more time and I'm adept at it," due in part to working in a nursing home when she was young.

"The most challenging (part) would be the whole thing of taking on decisions for her," Manning said.

"It's a big responsibility. (For example), she broke her hip this fall, and I had to decide where to take her for rehab," she said.

But there are rewards, too, Manning said.

She was able to convince Kay Murphy to accompany the family to Flathead Lake last summer to attend Murphy's granddaughter's wedding.

"She's just a dear - she's so appreciative for everything I do for her," Manning said.

And she returns the appreciation to a mother-in-law who "was just a fantastic grandmother to my children."

additional resources

Powerful Tools program:

http://www.montana.edu/wwwhd/Powerful_Tools.html

MSU Extension MontGuide publication:

“Caregiving: When Our Parents Need Our Help,”
available online at <http://msuextension.org/publications/HomeHealthandFamily/MT200802HR.pdf>.

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