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LIFESTYLES



Westlake Shopping Center parking lot provides specially marked spaces for parents of toddlers. Peoria is part of a nationwide move among store and shopping center owners to offer toddler parking, special spots for senior citizens and stork parking for pregnant women.

LARRY BROOKS/
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More space for those who need it

By PAM ADAMS
of the Journal Star

Parking lots across the country are setting aside special spaces for mothers and the elderly.

handicapped parking spaces.

Had more people known the situation, there might have been screams of outrage when stork parking disappeared from Venture's parking lot last year.

Stork parking?
Keep reading. Parking spaces reserved for pregnant women, for parents with toddlers, and for senior citizens — a take-off on handicapped parking — are popping up in parking lots across the country. But the stork parking situation at Venture's in Evergreen Plaza is problematic.

Like more than 100 other Venture's stores, the Evergreen Plaza spaces for pregnant women last May around Mother's Day. The idea supposedly came from the company president who got it while talking to a pregnant friend.

In Peoria, vandals demolished the signs a little more than a month after they appeared. As of last week, the signs still had not been replaced and no one at Venture's corporate offices could really explain why.

Despite the local Venture's situation, the beyond-handicapped-parking trend appears to be gain-

ing ground — space by space.

Kroger grocery stores in a handful of cities are test marketing stork parking, though there are no plans to expand nationally in the near future. Smaller retail, grocery and discount stores make it available throughout the country. In Asheville, N.C., the local baseball team offers an "expectant mother zone."

At least one suburban Chicago church offers priority parking for parents with toddlers. Dade County, Fla., requires major parking areas to supply toddler parking.

In the Peoria area, designated parking for senior citizens and/or parents with toddlers apparently has generated more interest than stork parking.

Kohl's department store in the Willow Knolls Court shopping center offers special parking for senior citizens. Westlake Shopping Center offers parking for senior citizens

and parents with toddlers.

The push for designated parking for parents of toddlers inched forward several months ago when Dr. Rudolph Kern, a Peoria optometrist, asked the city of Peoria traffic commission to institute specialized parking for parents with toddlers in major parking areas.

When Kern read about toddler parking in a Family Circle magazine, he immediately thought of his daughter, a suburban Chicago resident with small children, which in a roundabout way explains how he ended up talking to Peoria traffic commissioners.

The commission agreed with the concept, but not with Dade County's law. They decided, according to city traffic engineer Jim Baumann, that parking lot owners could provide selective parking voluntarily as long as they did not decrease the number of

handicapped parking spaces. Baumann wrote letters to major parking lot proprietors, such as Northwoods Mall and Metro Centre, making them aware of the traffic commission discussion. The letters emphasized the safety issue as it relates to parents with young children.

"The bottom line was the traffic commission didn't want to make it mandatory," Baumann says.

The traffic commission's concerns reflect a broader realm of issues, some real, some imagined.

As a Detroit grocery store executive put it, "There are so many problems. How do you know who's pregnant and who's not... And there are all the other groups who would want the same treatment. I mean, what do you do for a guy who just had a vasectomy?"

But few of the retailers who have enacted specialized parking report any problems.

"It's just a courtesy," says Les Cohen of Cohen Development Co., owners of Westlake Shopping Center. There are no fines for illegal parking in the toddler or senior citizen zones. "But we'd hope people would be ethical."



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