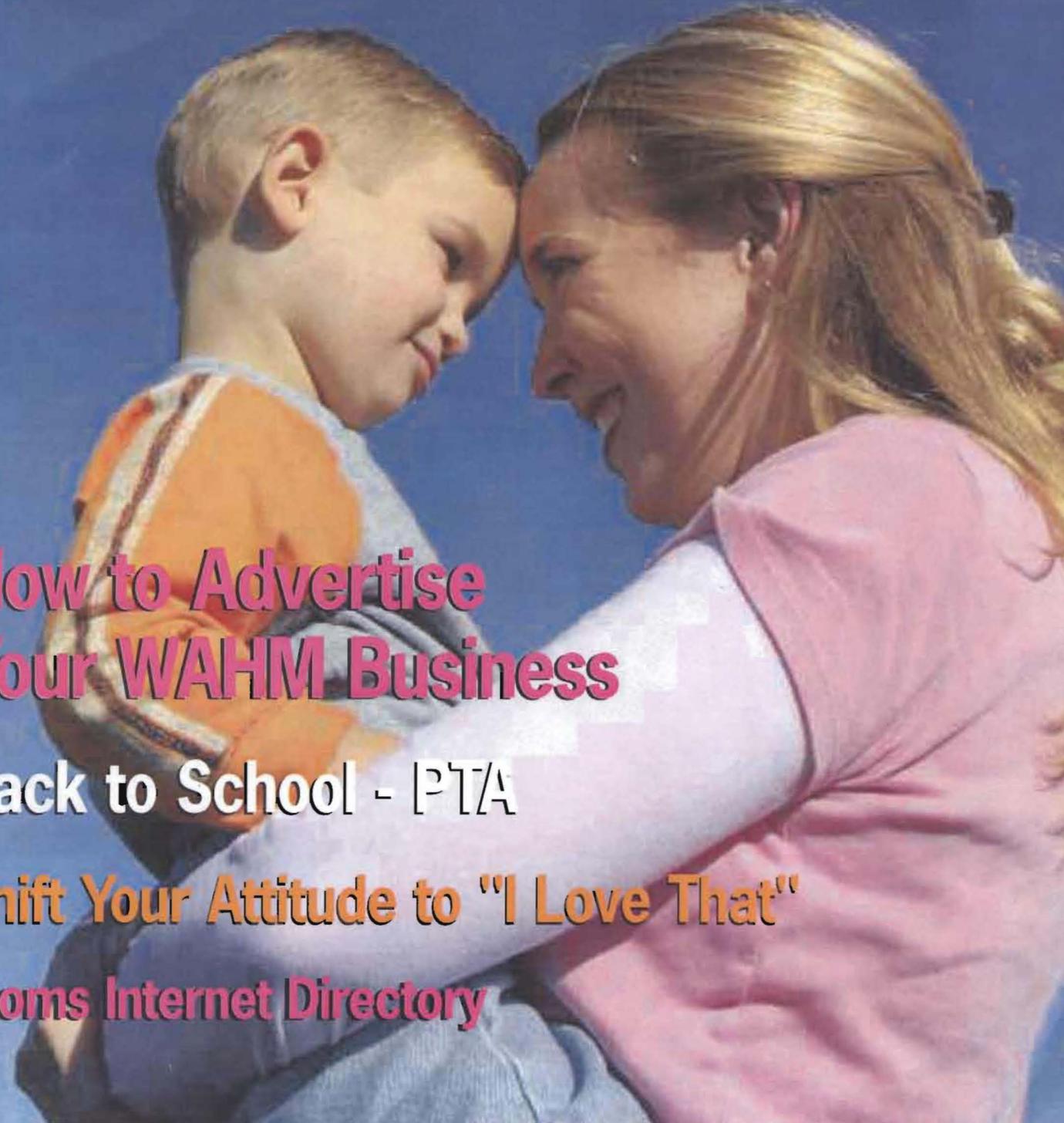


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## So, You Want to Join the PTA?

*School is back, and so are the PTA moms!*

by Allena Tapia

**D**o you sometimes feel as if the PTA or family council at your child's school has a "secret handshake"? Do you think those meetings are for "others": room mothers, or just the stay at home moms? Think again!

While it may feel like you have to sign your firstborn away to head a committee, or know someone who knows someone in order to plan the next after school bash, this is rarely the case. But, this is what it can seem



like to parents who, for whatever reason, are not able to get to most of (or any of!) the regular meetings. Whether it's work schedule, other extracurricular obligations, or just plain, old end-of-the-day exhaustion,

many parents do not find the time to make it to the regular PTA meetings, and then start to feel left out halfway through the year when the same groups of moms and dads show up and staff all the cook outs and banquets. Did you miss a pledge meeting somewhere or something?

So, how can one get involved without attending the monthly potluck, selling your soul, or at least baking exactly 144 perfect cupcakes? A good starting place is, of course, touching base with your child's teacher. He/she may have individual class needs that exist on a much smaller scale than those met by the PTA. Making contact just once at the beginning of the year is not enough, though. Consistent (but not constant) reminders that you are available for cutting, pasting, and hosting will go a long way to keep your helping hands in the forefront of their mind.

Another good strategy is to respond to school-wide calls for volunteers. Even though you think they're all clones, chances are your PTA cannot possibly cover every event. Show up and help out, and while you're there, chat up your co-workers.

Or, you could try a different strat-

egy and actually break the ranks of your PTA. Sources say that they're not there simply to make up team chants while eating macaroni salad! In fact, the reason that your PTA

may seem so chummy is because they eat dinner together once a month; for some parents, that's more than they see their teenagers.

In fact, many PTA's are offering perks to get membership up. For example, babysitting cooperatives allow the business at hand to be done, while younger siblings are occupied

elsewhere. Instead of potlucks, groups may actually make dinner, using an earmarked portion of the budget. Acknowledging that all families are different, with different needs in the after school hours will lead to this kind of flexibility and forethought.

So next time you don't know what to make for dinner, why not see what you can scrounge up at the local PTA meeting? No secret password needed, guaranteed!

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Allena Tapia is a freelance writer and a family council regular. PTA passwords and macaroni salad recipes are available at her website: [www.msu.edu/~tapia](http://www.msu.edu/~tapia)

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