

# The East Greenwich Pendulum

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## Doula helps mothers through motherhood

By DAVID PEPIN

Not everyone knows what a doula is, admits Leah DeCesare. (It's actually a Greek word for "a woman who serves.").

But any husband would be thankful to have one when his wife's ready to deliver a baby.

"In this country, we've put dads in the position of birth counselor, but they don't always know what do to when their wife is in pain. They're very happy to have this service," said DeCesare, recently elected Northeast regional director of DONA International, which educates, trains and certifies doulas worldwide.

DeCesare, a mother of three who moved to East Greenwich from New Jersey in 2006, is the co-founder of the two-year-old Doulas of Rhode Island. She estimates there are 30 to 40 doulas in the state.

"I came from a business background, with a degree in communications and marketing. But after having my oldest daughter (now 12), I realized I'd love to do the job of the nurse. I didn't want to go into the clinical end, but the support end."

There are two types of doulas, DeCesare said: birth (or labor support) doulas and post-partum doulas.

Birth doulas, she said, meet with couples prior to birth to provide guidance in planning for their delivery day.

"If the mother has any kind of twinge, we talk it through. We advise them on whatever might be appropriate if the contractions pick up or are strong, and we'll meet them at home or the hospital," DeCesare said.

Post-partum doulas, she said, help them through the first three months of motherhood, through ways such as training them with breast feeding and bottle feeding.

"This is to give them the support and be like the best mother or mother-in-law coming in to help take care of the family," she said.

DeCesare started by assisting with childbirths in New Jersey and working at a transitional residence for homeless teen mothers. She became DONA International's Rhode Island representative two years ago, and is serving on the committee organizing the organization's

convention in Boston next summer.

"This position is quite a step up," DeCesare said of her promotion to regional representative.

The most important part of her work, she says, is helping to educate families about childbirth and the experiences that come immediately afterward.

"A lot of parents say, 'I wish I had known about you when I was having my babies,'" DeCesare said.