

Daddy daycare



Chris Payne takes a photo of campers Tehgan, Tristyn and Grad with the card house they built Thursday morning. Payne, a kindergarten teacher, is the owner of Cool Care Club, which offers daycare for 60 school-age kids when school is not in session. Staff photos by Sarah Midgorden

How one father's summer job became a big business

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A father of four, a child-care provider to 60 kids and a kindergarten teacher, Chris Payne works with young ones both when school is in session and when it's not. It's what he loves to do.

Known as "Mr. Chris" to his daycare children, Payne started the business, Cool Care Club, 20 years ago out of the basement of his house as a way to generate income. He was an elementary education major in college and worked for nearly two years at the Kansas State University Child Development Center.

"I purchased a house on Eighth Street right across from Blumont Elementary, and we were remodeling the basement for an apartment, and I started showing that apartment to prospective tenants," Payne said. "The more I showed people the more I thought, I don't want some body else living at my house."

He needed to make some money and he liked what he did at the Child Development Center, but always

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— Chris Payne

thought that he wanted to take the children he worked with to more places.

"So the idea was born. Well, maybe I could do this on my own in that space," Payne said.

His daycare now operates out of the basement of the First Baptist Church of Manhattan, 2121 Rhinehills Road, and out of his own house three doors down, which is licensed to care for 12 children.

In the summer, four full-time employees help him watch the kids.

As a child, Payne enjoyed taking care of his younger cousins, and by

the time he was in junior high he was paid by his aunt to babysit.

"I enjoyed it then, and I enjoy it now," Payne said. "I made a career out of something I love to do."

Now, he brings two of his own four children, Amanda and Carter, to daycare with him. Amanda will be in fourth grade this fall, and Carter will be in second.

"I get the best of both worlds because I get to bring my kids to work with me, and I get it all day," Payne said.

Payne and his wife, Amy, an occupational therapist with the Manhattan-Ogden school district, also have two older children, Caleb, who will be a sophomore in high school, and Alison, a soon-to-be eighth-grader.

"I also teach, and we have four kids and people all the time are asking, 'How do you do it all?' It's because it all happens slowly," Payne said. "Somebody didn't drop four kids at my door and say, 'Here's your kids.' No, they start as babies."

During the school year, Payne teaches kindergarten at Roosevelt Elementary and operates his day-



Payne chats with Melissa Dinsa as she signs a permission slip for her son, Joshua Thursday morning at the Cool Care Club.

care as an after-school program. When school is not in session, he offers care all day.

Now that it's summer, the children he cares for are swimming, having picnics, playing games and checking out books from the library.

Near the end of the day, they get to break out their electronics and play video games Dance Dance Revolution and Mario Kart, or any activity of their choice.

"We don't do those all day," Payne said.

During the day, when the kids aren't outside or going somewhere, they have a menu board of games and activities from which they can choose.

Payne estimated that he has 57 hours of contact with children a week, on top of Payne is also his own accountant, director of transportation and administrator.

His wife, he said, does almost everything at home, including calendar-keeping and scheduling.

"I couldn't do what I do without her taking care of that part of it," Payne said.

When he's with his own children, Payne likes to watch their athletic events, and he said Caleb is taking an interest in collecting Skelly Oil memorabilia with him. He has about 1,200 items.

Payne is also introducing his children to "Cheers," passing on one of his favorite TV shows.

Looking ahead to Father's Day on Sunday, Amanda said Friday that her dad is a good one. She said they recently built a cardboard car out of a lawn mower box.

"He takes us to fun places and restaurants a lot," she said.

Payne said within every child is something great.

"Every single one of them is full of some kind of greatness, and I try to appreciate that and celebrate that every day with them," he said.

At daycare pick up time on Friday, Payne said goodbye to every child individually. He made keeping track of dozens of children and their parents coming in and out seem easy, with a laid-back demeanor acquired from years of experience.

What Payne hopes for the children he has taught and cared for over the years is that they had fun.

"I want them to have a good feeling, a good memory, about their time spent with me, whether it's here or at school," he said. "They may not remember exactly what they did, but hopefully they remember that they had a great time and they were safe."



Payne plays a card game with his son, Carter, top left, and daughter, Amanda, top right, and other Cool Care Club students Thursday morning.