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GALLERY



Tender Care doula Ruth MacCauley holds 2-day-old Aliza Jane McKugh, top, as her mother, Karen, prepares to breast-feed. Just spending time listening, to and aiding the mother is part of the doula's role, but help with new experiences like hair brushing and the first sponge bath, below and at right, is truly invaluable.

Mothers' Helper

It's a Greek word meaning "one who mothers the mother." At a time when mothers are sometimes sent home less than 24 hours after giving birth and state legislators are debating how long insurance should cover postpartum recovery (the bill comes up later this month), mothering is just what women need. Thus, the rise of the doula, a nonmedical support person who assists, supports and nurtures the new mother, baby and family. They ensure mothers get rest and proper nutrition, and help with mood preparation and household organization. Cheri Merley founded her Newhall-based Tender Care agency to help women segue more readily through the change from womanhood to motherhood. It was inspired after the birth—and the accompanying exhaustion—of her daughter Amanda. Now her service offers the helpful option for older women who may no longer have a mother to teach them the basics of bottles and diapers. And for the doulas themselves, there is the chance to give back in a world where the wisdom of age isn't always valued. As Ruth MacCauley, a doula known as "Mother MacCauley" says, "Every girl that I work with I see her as my own daughter."






Photos by FRANCINE ORR
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