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Infant sign language instructor Etel Leit taught 40 women and their children basic signs at a recent shower for a Brentwood mom-to-be. "She didn't want the ordinary thing," says Leit. "She wanted it to be fun and educational, something people would remember. It was really different."

After mastering the signs for "milk," "more" and "Mommy," the group sang nursery rhymes with the gestures they had

learned and played sign language games. Guests took home sign language books and DVDs, along with valuable lessons to share with their children.

DOMINION MEDIA

Baby Showers Done Right

Moms-to-Be Are Taking This Old-Fashioned Tradition to New Heights



By Lisa Armony

On a balmy summer day, 16 of Francesca Segrè's closest friends gathered in a backyard garden to celebrate her pregnancy. Seated around a Tibetan water bowl, the women passed an organic rose to one another, holding the flower just long enough to offer Segrè a blessing, recite a poem or share with her some hard-earned parenting advice. When they came full circle, they poured the water from the bowl into a bottle so the Venice writer and journalist could bathe her baby, due at the end of October, in her friends' good wishes.

"We're not huge fans of traditional baby showers, so we incorporated my husband's Chinese culture and traditions from our

Venice mom Francesca Segrè became the canvas for some mom-inspired artwork during her unusual baby shower, which included Tibetan rituals and an organic menu.

childhood," says Crystal Reul-Chen, Segrè's sister-in-law, who hosted the event last August in her Westchester home. "Everyone said it was the best baby shower they had ever been to."

Showers have come a long way. Once relegated to quaint tea parties for select female family and friends, baby showers have evolved into meticulously planned events with themes, venues, food and other accoutrements as varied as the imagination allows. From traditionally inspired, all-girl

bashes to coed soirees that include Zen-like rituals, today's showers are as unique and diverse as the women they celebrate.

Dating as far back as ancient Greek and Roman times, baby showers are a celebration of new life. Historically held after birth, the shower was often the first viewing of the new arrival, with the mother's female relatives and closest friends gathering to drink tea and to "shower" her with homemade offerings of food, clothing, blankets and other life essentials.

Girlfriends started throwing showers for each other before birth sometime after World War II, and the expectant mom became the focus of attention. Gradually becoming full-blown parties, showers have come to include elaborate invitations and decorations, expansive menus, baby-themed games, and goody bags for departing guests as standard fare.

"I knew I was having a boy so everything was blue camouflage: the invitations, decorations, even the blueberry drinks and blue-frosted cupcakes," says Heidi Fitzsimmons of Manhattan Beach, whose 15-guest shower was held in June.

"We played 'the string game' [where guests cut pieces of string to fit around the mom-to-be's bulging tummy], guessed baby food flavors and painted onesies. It had a tea-party feel outside in my friend's backyard."

While showers like Fitzsimmons' have become the convention, many women are choosing more distinctive ways to welcome their impending arrivals.

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