

A little child's play

Kids Connection offers place for children to learn through play

Many innovations or business ideas arise from an entrepreneur overcoming a challenge in their personal life, and then extending that solution or knowledge to others.

For Renee Gust, owner of Kids Connection in St. Charles, that is exactly what happened.

Approximately nine years ago, Gust wanted to find more opportunities to get her 2-year-old son into age-appropriate programs.

"As a stay-at-home mom for five years, I felt playing with other children was not as easy as it sounded," Gust said. "Not too many people want 2-year-olds running around their home for a play date, and I'm not ashamed to admit that one run to the grocery store without a little one would have made my week."

With a 10-year career in the business world and armed with a degree in communications and three years as an education major, Gust knew she had an opportunity to not just find access to programs for her children, but to create them for others as well.

"One of my dear friends thought of the name Kids Connection, and from that the tag line 'connecting kids through play' was born," Gust said. "So often play is construed as children running around or doing puzzles in a group setting. Because of my education classes, time with my own children and a few years with children having special needs, I knew 'play' could be so much more."

Gust is also attending Northern Illinois University and working towards completion of her masters in early childhood.

Referring to itself as a preschool and children's activity center, Kids Connection offers a staff dedicated to trying to find the best way to help children play while also being challenged academically. It follows Illinois state learning standards, and the staff plans les-



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sons around each standard. Gust said that what makes Kids Connection stand out is its staff and their approach to each individual child.

"So many preschools focus on their perception of academics, play or location, but I really feel that without quality staff and a plan developed by each team member you don't have the glue," Gust said. "We work together to create an environment for each student to maximize their potential. Yes, even preschoolers have lofty goals and achievements we should embrace each day. If you don't feel that in your heart, then you should not be working with preschool children."

Gust explained that children enhance their physical, social, emotional, language and cognitive development while at play and

by doing. The continuous repetitions that develop the synapses of each child, while at play in a safe and warm environment, is the goal of Kids Connection.

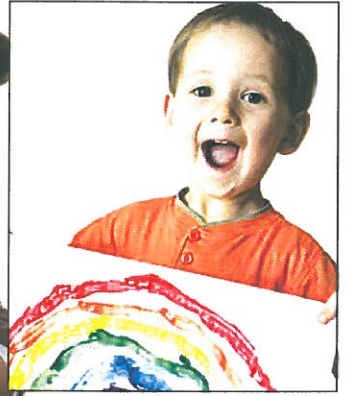
"Play coupled with academics will produce early learners excited about school and their achievements," she said. "A Chinese proverb states: 'I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.'"

In addition, Gust has a special place in her heart, and at Kids Connection, for children with special needs. She had spent her first three years in college as a special education major before switching her major in her senior year. She also has spent many hours over the years volunteering and working with a special recreation organization and the Special Olympics.

Because of her background and affinity for working with children with special needs, she ensures that the Kids Connection staff go out of their way to adapt their programs to accommodate all children.

"Children grow so much when with others their own age and become more adaptable when with other adults too," she said.

Kids Connection offers programs for children 2 through pre-K in a 6,400-square-foot building with a 1,400-square-foot gym.



>> Kids Connection

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