

LIFE EDITOR: CAROL JANKOWSKI
894-2231 EXT. 2640
cjankowski@therecord.com

SECTION C

LIFE on the run

CLASSIFIED - C3

Find the perfect daycare for your child! Check out Child Care Wanted 1470.



TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2004

MONDAYS: Learning • TUESDAYS: Life on the Run • WEDNESDAYS: Life at Home • THURSDAYS: Trends • FRIDAYS: Health

Toy libraries allow kids to test endless supply of play things

Children are adventurous creatures with an unending appetite for exploration and trying new things. These characteristics help them learn so much in such a short period of time. The downside is that it can be difficult for parents to keep up — especially when it comes to providing toys that keep them amused.

Toy libraries are a great solution to this challenge. They allow parents to borrow toys for a short period of time for minimal or no cost. Kids get to try out something new on a regular basis without draining their parents' bank accounts. Borrowing toys is especially useful for families with small living quarters and limited storage space.



RUTH PETERS & STEPHANIE HAHN
GRAND RIVER KIDS

land centre depend on volunteers so change periodically. They are currently open Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to noon. Membership costs \$10 per year and entitles you to borrow two toys at a time plus one video and one computer game for two weeks.

Sunbeam Family Resource Centre and Toy Library, Rosemount Public School, 80 Burlington Dr., Kitchener, 744-9223.

At the Sunbeam centre, you can borrow three toys per child for a two-week period. The membership fee is \$20/year for a family and \$30/year for child-care providers. The toy library is open Monday, 1:30 to 7 p.m.; and Tuesday and Thursday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Cambridge Family Early Years Centre, 149 Ainslie St. N., Cambridge, 740-8353.

For a \$10 annual membership fee, you can borrow "as many items as you have children in your household" for two weeks at the Cambridge Family Early Years Centre. You can also borrow three videos per family for one week. The toy library is open Monday to Thursday, 9:15 to 11:15 a.m.; Wednesday, 1 to 3 p.m.; and Thursday, 6 to 7:30 p.m.

Langs Farm Village Association Family Resource Centre, 887 Langs Dr., Unit 1, Cambridge, 653-1182.

This family resource centre bundles most of their toys into "bags" grouped by theme. The membership fee of \$2 for two years allows you to borrow two bags of toys or two videos for two weeks. The centre is open Monday to Wednesday 9:30am to 4:30pm; and Thursday 9:30am to noon.

Ruth Peters and Stephanie Hahn are co-authors of Growing UP in the Grand River Region, a guide to products and services for children under 12. Watch for their next column on Feb. 24 for March Break ideas. They may be contacted at 885-5471 or e-mail growingup@rogers.com.

Our Place Family Resource and Early Years Centre, St. Francis School, 154 Gatewood Rd., Kitchener, 571-1626.

For an annual fee of \$12, Our Place lets parents and caregivers borrow up to six items at a time — including toys, video games and videos — for two weeks. The toy library is open Monday to Thursday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Friday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.; Saturday, 9:30 a.m. to noon; and Monday and Wednesday, 6:30 to 8 p.m.

Kitchener Public Library, main branch: 85 Queen St. N., Kitchener, 743-0271; Pioneer Park: 150 Pioneer Dr., Kitchener, 748-2740.

Anyone with a Kitchener Public Library card can borrow toys for free from two library branches for a one-week period. The main branch allows you to take two toys at a time while Pioneer Park, which has a larger collection, allows you to borrow three toys.

A.R. Kaufman YMCA, 333 Carwood Ave., Kitchener, 743-5201.

You do not have to be a Y member to use the toy library. For an annual membership fee of \$20, you can take out three toys plus two books for two weeks. CDs and videos are available as well as large, gross-motor toys. Hours for the toy library are: Monday to Thursday, 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and 2:30 to 7 p.m.; Friday, 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.; and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Mill-Courtland Community Centre, 216 Mill St., Kitchener, 741-2491.

The hours of the toy-lending library at the Mill-Court-



PHILIP WALKER, RECORD STAFF

Karem Kalin holds a display case of her Smiles Made Easy cards. The cards' messages are designed to be personalized.

Say it with a smile

Tiny 'thought cards' help focus message of love and support

BY VALERIE HILL
RECORD STAFF

Karem Kalin has the soul of a romantic and often showed her husband, Mark, how much she cared by slipping little love notes into his pockets or lunch.

Those notes have now turned into a successful business for the Kitchener woman, who is pleased with the success of her Smiles Made Easy "thought cards," packaged in small, silver tins.

The cards are available in four categories: I Love it When..., I Have Fun When ..., I Am Proud When ... and I Remember When....

Within each category are 15 cards. For example, in the tin labelled I Am Proud When, the cards start:

- ① You made me proud when ...
- ② You are a great ...
- ③ You are especially good at ...
- ④ I have fun when we...

The words prompt the sender to complete the thought, customizing it for the recipient, whether that person is a child, a grandparent, a friend or a spouse.

"I've had the idea for years,"

said Kalin, a registered dietitian with Region of Waterloo Public Health. The idea sprouted not only from the notes she wrote to her husband, but also a surprise reconnection with an old friend who had left the province years earlier.

"It's hard when you haven't talked to someone in a long time to just pick up the phone and pick up where you left off," she said. "I wanted a way to let her know I still thought of her and that she was still close to my heart."

Kalin and her husband, a high school teacher in Cambridge, took out a second mortgage on their home to launch the \$15,000 notes business. They did most of the legwork themselves, including asking retailers if they'd sell the cards.

"I would just cold call and I got a lot of 'nos,' but you have to keep going," Kalin said. "Sometimes it just didn't fit with the store. (And) I'm trying to be very particular where they go."

That was less than a year ago. Today nearly 30 stores across Canada carry the cards and they are also available through their website, www.smilemadeeasy.com. In

BUYING INFO

Smiles Made Easy thought cards retail for \$7.99 and are available in Kitchener at the Children's Museum gift shop, and in Waterloo at Athena (Conestoga Mall), Angel Worn, Hearth & Hearts Flowers, The Paper Tree and Turkey Goose Creations. The website www.smilemadeeasy.com has a Where to Buy link for other locations.

July, the cards were featured as a "hot new pick" in Retail News, a Canadian trade magazine.

Kalin hopes the cards help people say those things they want to say, but either can't find the time, or the words, to voice them. Dads can slip an "I'm proud when ..." card into a child's lunch. Or an entire box of cards can be presented, each carrying a different heartfelt sentiment.

Kalin did most of her business research while on maternity leave. She found the Internet made it easy to track down information she needed. The Guelph Enterprise Centre also offered advice on starting a

business.

Her first step was finding a manufacturer to produce the small tins with hinged lids for a reasonable price. Then she found Pathways Promotions, a Waterloo marketing company, to design a logo and inserts and to develop marketing strategies.

"I interviewed several companies and always met with men," Kalin said, adding with a smile: "They didn't understand the concept. Pathways was run by two women — they understood."

With her husband's help, Kalin assembles the packages at home in the evening, after her 22-month-old son Walker has gone to bed. They pack the cards in tins, smooth on logo stickers and prepare everything for shipping.

Neither had any formal business training, which might have been an advantage, she admits.

"It was a huge learning procedure," she said. "Do I keep it safe or take the jump and hope I sell them? Sometimes the best thing is ignorance."

Nevertheless, she would encourage budding entrepreneurs to act on their ideas. "You have to have confidence in your product and what you're doing," she said.

vhill@therecord.com

RELATIONSHIPS

'Boyfriend' in a box gives singles a Valentine's chuckle

BY KELLY LOVEROCK
FOR THE RECORD

Valentine's Day often evokes groans from singletons, because the overdone, overly cheesy couples' day is inherently exclusive.

At 16, I set out to change that.

My previous exploits included slapping anti-Valentine's Day posters on the hallway walls of my high school. They were promptly removed by the ever-cheerful students' council.

I decided on another approach for the following Valentine's Day. I planned to celebrate friendship, but only with my single friends. Knowing my coupled friends would be showered with gifts from boyfriends, I wanted to let my single friends know they were just as loved.

While browsing at a small store in Ottawa on my trip to pick up some goodies, I came across something called a Boyfriend in a Box. It is exactly what the name promises — the ideal mate, just not the flesh and blood kind.

As I looked over the contents, my first thought was that I could do better and not drop \$20 on the generic store-bought packages. I started a rough list in my head of the things I would need.

What do boyfriends typically con-

sist of, I asked myself, and what would my friends appreciate?

Heading out to the dollar store, I picked up a few rings, bracelets and necklaces. At a local treat shop, I purchased some chocolates and dried roses. Then I gathered four small boxes from my basement, and sat down with a pile of magazines to cut out eligible bachelors.

I avoided celebrities and tried to keep in mind the type of guys my friends found attractive.

One friend was into Led Zeppelin and classic rock at the time, so I was looking for a grungier boyfriend to suit her tastes. Another was more conservative, so I kept my eyes out for a preppier guy.

For my artist friend, I was looking for someone laid back, but with a good sense of style.

And for the sporty one, I aimed for a tall guy in a basketball uniform.

After assembling an army of male cutouts, I made the final selections, pairing off each of my four friends. Then I glued the men to cardboard backing.

But I wasn't done. For each boyfriend in a box, I created a stat sheet: his date of birth, eye colour, hair

colour and weight, interests, and a minor skeleton in the closet.

I added details about their relationship: how they met, what they did on their first date, how long they've been together and how they came to receive each item in the box (the piece of jewelry, the flowers and so on).

Lastly, for a laugh, I threw in condoms (not that there's anything funny about safe sex).

I decorated the boxes and presented them to my friends.

They were received with squeals of delight and thanks as they pulled each item out and read over their stories.

We still joke about the faux boyfriends. And I know they keep them stashed away, even eight years later, during which time most of them have found the real thing.

I carried on this little tradition of creating Boyfriends in Boxes as I went on to university and met new, single friends in need of a laugh and some appreciation on a day intended for lovers.

Kelly Loverock is a graduate student in journalism at the University of Western Ontario. She interned in The Record's newsroom in January.



ROBERT WILSON, RECORD STAFF

Kelly Loverock compiles "boyfriends in a box to give to single female friends who don't have a significant other on Valentine's Day.