

The Nook: A new play place for kids in town

By **Nelia Raposo**
Special to The IFP

Preschoolers and their caregivers have a new way to spend the day in Georgetown. They can visit a play café.

Until now, the nearest indoor play place, aside from the local McDonald's Restaurant, was about a twenty minute drive out of town into Milton or Mississauga.

The Nook changes that.

Located in the Moore Park Plaza on Main St. N., the play café offers a lounge-type adult and kid-friendly environment. It is a mix between a kindergarten classroom and a trendy coffee shop.

Its inspiration came from a family visit to New York City.

The Nook's owner Crystal Wager and her husband used to visit New York often before becoming parents. When they visited a few years ago with two toddlers in tow, she wondered if having to care for little kids in the big city would "ruin (the experience of) New

York" for her.

The opposite happened. It was on a visit to a children's museum that the seed for Georgetown's newest small business was planted.

Its official grand opening is Sunday, Jan. 31 but already there are a few regulars.

Jodi Ottorino, 31, visits with her 3-year-old son Lucas.

"It's a nice place to hang out. It's all in sight. The kids can mosey on and do their thing and you don't need to worry. The first time we came to check it out, he made a new friend and we couldn't get him to leave. We've been here since 9:30 a.m. and he's still going strong, playing with toys," Ottorino says noting that it is nearly noon.

Ottorino's friend Jen Cass is visiting for the first time with her 18-months-old son Andrew.

"I think it is a great place. It's nice to be able to get out. It has a different feel than the Early Years Centre. The EYC is more structured. This is like a café where par-

ents can meet up and also have their children play in a safe environment. It is nice and bright and cheerful as well," Cass says. "I'm a part-time stay-at-home mom so it's hard to find programs that are available when I have free time with my son. Here we can stay as long as we want and we don't get kicked out."

Divided into several play areas, the space provides opportunity for social interaction and dramatic play. There is a fire station, a hospital, a house, a market/restaurant and a dress-up area that includes a super hero skyline as its backdrop.

"In a lot of places you end up chasing your kids because you can't see them so you don't get a chance to talk to other adults. Here you can see your children from every vantage point," Wager says, adding that her young daughters often drag her up onto the large climbing structures at other indoor play places.

From concept to reality the process took about a year and a



The Nook owner Crystal Wager cuddles with her two-year-old daughter, Ivy, at the play place's location in Moore Park Plaza on Main St. N.

Photo by Nelia Raposo

half. Wager says that's in large part thanks to help from business consultants with Halton Region.

Sandra Nuhn manages the region's small business consultants who are available for free one-hour sessions at the Halton Hills

Public Library twice a month.

"Crystal met with all three of our consultants going back nearly two years now," Nuhn, Manager of Entrepreneurship and Innovation Halton Region, says.

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