

Lynnwood cafe caters to kids' play dates



Playdate Cafe founder and owner Lizz Quain plays with her daughters, Aubrey and Gabriella, 4, during the girls' recent birthday party at Playdate Cafe in Lynnwood.



Playdate Cafe in Lynnwood opened for business in March. The 8,500-square-foot business offers coffee for parents and nutritious food for kids, an indoor play center, birthday parties, a preschool and family events.

By **Amy Watkins**, Special to The Herald

LYNNWOOD -- It's a gathering place for little ones and their favorite grown-ups.

That's the tagline for Playdate Cafe, 4114 198th St. SW. Founder and owner Lizz Quain worked many hours before her small business opened in February to make sure the description rings true.

The mother of 4-year-old twin girls began working on a plan for the cafe that caters to families with young children. It offers coffee for adults and nutritious food for kids, an indoor play center, birthday parties, a preschool and family events.

"We try to create what I call an imaginative play space," said Quain, 46. "It's also good for adults because we serve coffee and we play adult music. It's relaxing for the parents while enriching for the kids." Quain started to develop her idea for Playdate Cafe in 2010 when her daughters, Aubrey and Gabriella, were infants. During their first year, Quain was a stay-at-home mother who joined some mom groups to get out of the house and connect with other families with young children. It was a hassle for people to host play dates and although she and others tried to meet outside of their homes, some places didn't always turn out to be the best environments for children, Quain said. Then she heard about the concept of play cafes.

Quain, who has 20 years of business experience in sales, marketing and account management roles, became interested in starting her own cafe and started networking with other play business owners in and out of the state. She attended classes through StartZone, an entrepreneurial program at Highline Community College in Des Moines that helps members launch and grow their businesses. She started writing her business plan.

"It ended up being a 50-some-page business plan and it took me nine months to write it," Quain said. "I had to do so much research and talk with so many people in the business to figure out where I wanted to be located, the size and what I wanted to offer."

During this time, she gained some experience and learned about the food and beverage business by working at a healthy food cafe in Kent. She also worked part time at another play cafe in Gig Harbor. Quain said she it took about a year and applications to 15 banks to get a small-business loan.

Quain's next challenge was to find the right location for her business and found a spot in Lynnwood. The 8,500-square-foot leased location is ideal because it's off the crossroads of I-5 and I-405, Quain said.

"Play cafes tend to be a destination so people will drive from miles around, and they do," she said. "I get people driving from way up north of Everett, from Tacoma, from Issaquah, from Sammamish and from West Seattle. I thought we would draw from maybe a 10-mile radius but it's such a bigger area."

Quain started marketing her business on the Playdate Cafe Facebook page months before it opened. The first birthday party at the cafe was held in late January. She invited her first Facebook fans in February to a soft opening without admission charges. By March, Playdate Cafe was fully open for business.

Rowan Scott-Berry and her 11-month son, James, are now regulars at the cafe. The Lynnwood mother said she loves that many of the food options are either natural or organic and that she doesn't have to put any thought into making a visit.

"You don't have to clean your house, get snacks ready for people or anything like that," she said. "You just meet and get food. It's our second home. I really am using it like my extended living room."

Her son is happy the minute they walk through the Playdate Cafe door, Scott-Berry added.

"He starts shrieking with excitement," she said. "He's so happy here."

In addition to the cafe and play areas, Playdate Cafe also offers birthday parties and began holding a summer camp program in August. Preschool classes are scheduled to begin this month and other enrichment opportunities such as dance, yoga, cooking, language and arts and craft classes will be next, Quain said. She also plans to hold a grand celebration in place of a grand opening, as well as princess and superheroes parties and more holiday events.

"I want the parents to relax and have a good time but they still have to supervise their kids," she said.

While her busiest days are rainy days, Playdate Cafe's butterfly logo and bright decor are happy reminders of springtime, Quain added. A silver necklace she wears has the names of her daughters inscribed near the cutout of a butterfly.

"My third child, Playdate Cafe," she said. "It's really a labor of love and the community has really chipped in."

Playdate Cafe

Playdate Cafe at 4114 198th St. SW, Suite 3, in Lynnwood returns to its seven-day schedule beginning Sept. 3. For more information, go to www.playdatecafe.biz or call 425-582-7007.