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Time to P.L.A.Y.

Frackville area fitness center debuts program

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FRACKVILLE — An area fitness center is trying something new for children ages 3 to 13.

The woman behind it, Lori A. DiRenzo, said she hopes it not only benefits local families, but finds a niche outside Schuylkill County.

"Nearly one-third of our nation's children and adolescents are overweight or are at risk of becoming overweight," said DiRenzo, owner of Just Aerobics & Fitness Center, 101 Fireman's Plaza, Frackville.

Her program for children is called P.L.A.Y. (Parents Lead Active Youth).

"It's a program designed to bring kids together with their parents, to help kids build the self-esteem necessary to gain confidence and to understand the importance of exercise," DiRenzo said.

P.L.A.Y. is currently scheduled from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturdays in a special workout room at Just Aerobics. It was initiated on Dec. 11.

"Right now, I have about seven children participating, but they're all different age groups," DiRenzo said.

There are sessions designed for three age groups: 3 to 6; 7 to 10; and 11 to 13. The cost to participate per child is \$35 for 30 minutes, \$40 for 45 minutes and \$45 for an hour.

DiRenzo conducted a class for one of her first, and youngest, participants, Maggie E. Joseph, 3, of Mahanoy City.

On a rainy day, she gathered up a bunch of Nerf balls and said, "On the count of three, we're going to have some snow."

On three, she launched them into the air. The child tried to catch them as they fell.

"Yeah, Maggie, that was so good!" DiRenzo said as she clapped.

Maggie's mother, Patricia E., looked on with a smile.

"With these things, we can also have snowball fights," DiRenzo said, referring to the balls which are as light as Styrofoam.

She came up with a series of activities like these, which actually involve movement akin to exercise. For instance, with the 3- to 5-year-olds, DiRenzo has come up with a series of hand-eye coordination skills.

"Little ones don't really get the concept of exercise as adults do. So you want to try to form that concept," she said. "They're going to look



Using Nerf balls, DiRenzo creates an illusion of snow falling as Maggie attempts to catch the balls as they fall.



Maggie E. Joseph, 3, of Mahanoy City, center, plays hopscotch with encouragement from her mother, Patricia E., right, and instructor, Lori A.

DiRenzo during an exercise session of the Parents Lead Active Youth (P.L.A.Y.) program at Just Aerobics & Fitness Center, Frackville.

at this as fun, so they're going to say 'OK mommy, OK daddy, let's do that fun thing.'"

There are a few reasons Patricia Joseph decided to bring her daughter to P.L.A.Y.

"I have two older sons and they're involved in school activities and there's really nothing to get her interested in," Patricia said. "We don't have anything for her to get exercise or her to have fun."

"This is the first thing that I've seen for her age group."

There's nothing quite like this in the area, DiRenzo said, and that encouraged the brainstorm she had to put it together.

"I've been working with kids for a while. Every year, I do a kids camp up in Penn State West Hazleton. I've had kids classes here at Just Aerobics Fitness Center," DiRenzo said.

On the business end of the project, DiRenzo applied for, and received a Service Mark (SM), franchising P.L.A.Y. throughout the state of Pennsylvania to start," DiRenzo said.

She also created a logo, which is the acronym illustrated in a row of red and

yellow balloons.

"I'd like to see one maybe in Allentown, Reading or Wilkes-Barre, and anyone who would be interested in starting to help me help kids combat obesity, they can have a business opportunity with the format I've designed," DiRenzo added.

Anyone interested in learning more about the program can call DiRenzo at 874-2202.



Joseph and her daughter have fun participating in the P.L.A.Y. program together.

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