

Yuppie offspring go to workout center

By Carolyn DeMarco
staff writer

ON FIRST PASS it looks like the epitome of yuppiehood — a workout place for infants and toddlers. But Gymboree, it turns out, is more than the Vic Tanny of the diaper set. It's not another drop-off center for parents to temporarily liberate themselves from their offspring. It's a place for baby to play, develop and grow with mom or dad right there at his/her side.

Jim and Kathy Cornell of Farmington Hills opened their fifth Gymboree franchise earlier this month in the Orchard Mall at Maple and Orchard Lake Road. The location features an open space with dozens of specially designed play equipment pieces. Child and parent(s) enroll in a 45-minute class once a week for 12 weeks for an opportunity to play on equipment, engage in activities, sing songs and chants with 15-20 other youngsters in their age group and their accompanying parents.

Many of the participants are working parents who bring baby in evenings after work. "We got a lot of suit and ties," Jim said.

"Some dads come in reluctantly," Kathy said, encouraged by their wives to take the baby just once during the 12 weeks. They often become part of the workout threesome. A \$75 charge for the 12 weeks is for the child and either or both parents. Grandparents, often the daytime caregivers, are also Gymboree fre-

quenters. And as expected, some children are accompanied by nannies.

CLASSES are offered for five different age groups:

• **Babygym (3-12 months)** — This is an introduction to colors, textures, sounds and rhythmic songs for baby, parent education for mom and dad. Gentle exercises are choreographed to music.

• **Gymboree I (10-18 months)** is a time to explore. Top priority is developing balance and building confidence in new-found mobility.

• **Gymboree II (16-30 months)** — In this class balance is practiced and body movements refined. Weekly themes like up, down, under and through teach concepts.

• **Gymboree III (2½-3½ years)** — Movement to music and activities with imagery is featured. Youngsters sing their own songs and take an active role in activities and games.

• **Gymgrad (3½-4½ years)** — Creative movement, pre-sport activities, special equipment and non-competitive games are designed to enhance skill development. Using special props, parents and kids explore creativity through movement.

The Gymboree "play with a purpose" concept was created in California and spread to the Midwest. Kathy Cornell was a new mother when she first sought something the Cornells could do with Katie, now 4 years old, and found a local Gymboree. Both were retail managers

for the Waterford Melijer's store. "We were into the '80s style of parenting to the 'nth degree," Jim said. "We were a threesome. We did it as a family."

WHEN KATHY found the Gymboree area franchise was for sale in late 1987, she quit her job thinking she could take over the business and run it two days a week. Since then they've taken over or established businesses in a church in Northville, the Mercy Center in Farmington Hills, the community room of Livonia Mall, and a commercial site in Plymouth. At the same time they've also added Maggie, 2½, and Robbie, 1, to the family.

"We had an office in the home and a computer. It just snowballed. It was more successful than anticipated," Jim said.

Mostly the job is fun. "If you're going to start a business, make sure it's one you can wear tennis shoes and sweat suits to," Kathy said. The difficult part is hiring. Staff members don't have to have college degrees, she said, but eight of nine do have early education background. In addition, all receive a six-week on-site training which includes first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

"We look for a personality, a type that is warm and affectionate — parents look upon them as resource people."

While the child is the main beneficiary of the class, the parents also benefit. "The mothers make friends and go on to make play groups. Some



Tanci Levitt and her father, Gary, are ready to call it quits after their workout in Gymboree.

have just moved here and don't know anyone. It's good for the first-time mom as a support group. . . They may have known about Gymboree in their own home town. It's the same

program and equipment." As a franchise bonus, enrolled vacationing families may attend a Gymboree in the spot they're visiting, if available.

Day and night classes are available in the new Gymboree in West Bloomfield four days a week. For information, call 473-1845.



ED CONLEY



In competition

Harrison High School's cheerleaders walked away from the Western Lakes Athletic Association competition with a third-place ribbon for the Crowd Response category; a third-place for Cheer Dance; and a fourth-place for Team Cheer. The girls,

above from left, are Gabrielle Aramian, Cathy Westbrook, Julie Longworth, Wendy Leland, Shannon Heaney, Irish Sabbe and Kim Gotteerman. At right, Heather Conley is flanked by Jennifer Brockhaus on her left and Theresa Kuclo on her right.



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