



KATHY O'DONOHUE

Slowing to the pace, view of a 3-year-old

Today was a "hyper morning," and I hate that. I usually rush, rushed a less than nutritionally balanced breakfast, hurriedly dashed the boys out the door to school. Shot a couple quick hoops with them before the bus. There remained tons of errands to do and a major messy kitchen. But my first priority reminds me loudly of her presence: Shea, 3 years old, still at home with Mom.

I contemplate the "freedom" I will have when all are enanced in school. Some of my friends have commented that after Shea starts first grade, my life will really open up. There are days I believe them, times I look forward to that passage in my life.

But there are even more special times like today when I realize the wonder and frank goodness of having this singular little partner in my days. She teaches me a great deal I could learn no where else.

This morning, for instance, as I attempted to rush out the door with her to run errands, she decided to bring along a mini Mickey and a mini Minnie and a few of their Beanie Baby friends in her mini wagon. I offered to pick up and carry the wagon, but was met by a resounding "No! They want a ride." I backed off

Please see CHAT ROOM, C4

Baskets brim with Babies

Adding the super-hot Beanie Babies dolls to her gourmet food and gift baskets has helped one woman's basement business to boom.



BY SUE MASON
STAFF WRITER

Her name is Susan ... no last name, thank you. When you sell Beanie Babies as part of your home-based business, you need to take precautions, she says.

Beanies are the rage. Children want them, adults collect them. And Susan's business, the Susan B. Ashlee Co., includes them in its product line. "It's the hottest collectible since Cabbage Patch Dolls; they put out new ones and retire others," Susan said. "They have a birthdate and a name. Collecting them can be fun, if you don't get carried away."

The Livonia resident didn't start her business because of the Beanie Babies - which she sells individually for \$6.99 - but they go well with her line of gifts and gourmet food baskets. With a bit of information about the recipient like the personality or birthdate, she creates customized baskets for around \$25 each.

Spotted canine Beanie Babies go well with a cotton Dalmatians throw for those



STAFF PHOTO BY TOM HOFFMEYER

Child's delight: A basket filled with Beanie Babies is enough to fill a child's face with smiles, according to the semi-anonymous founder of the Susan B. Ashlee Co., a home-based business that creates gift baskets with gourmet foods and, of course, Beanie Babies.

crazy about the breed or Disney's "101 Dalmatians." A basket for someone retiring will contain a retired Beanie Baby, and a care package for someone who's under the weather will have an appropriate Baby and chicken soup.

Spooky the Ghost was a perfect addition for her Halloween baskets, and Valentino with chocolates was a hit for Sweetest Day.

"It's a nice unisex toy," Susan said. "It can be kind of fun to collect, if you keep it within limits."

Susan started her company two years ago as a way of making keepsakes and heirlooms out of wedding gowns. The divorced mother of two

sons, she used the knowledge gained from her high school home economics class to turn her own wedding gown into a floor-length christening gown.

It was a hit with the friends she showed it to and, after a baby show at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Dearborn, the business took off.

"I had no pattern; I just cut it out," she said of the gown that she displays in her basement office. "People bring in their wedding gowns; I look at them and tell them what I can do."

"A lot of people keep their gowns and this way they turn them around into something they can pass down to their children."

She added gift baskets and gourmet foods when she took on pottery a friend had in her store and needed to move, accepting special orders over the telephone.

Word of mouth has helped her business grow to the point where her sister, Nancy, a Farmington Hills resident, now lends a hand.

Susan also holds open houses in early November, bringing in clients to sample the foods, leaf through the catalogs that the buyers use to order for major retailers and place their orders for Christmas.

"People are so appreciative," Susan

Please see BABIES, C4



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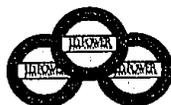
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Robert Schefman received his BFA from Michigan State University and his MA from University of Iowa. He has participated in a wide variety of group shows including Interventions at the Detroit Institute of Arts in 1995. He has completed numerous commissions in painting and sculpture for schools such as Wayne State, University of Iowa, and Cooley Law School in Lansing, and for restaurants such as Stelline at Somerset and at Tribune in Farmington Hills. His most recent mural commission was for Dearborn's 19th District Court Building.

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