

Playhouse Cafe's three owners use their professional ...

Lemoine's Playhouse Cafe has all the traditional amenities of a coffeehouse.

The menu includes a full espresso bar, salads, wraps and sandwiches, there's free Wi-Fi, and live acoustic music occasionally greets visitors.

But the refrigerator houses kid-friendly "organic peanut butterflies" and "beary turkey" sandwiches cut to look like those animals, and sippy cups sit on the tables alongside laptops and iced lattes.

"Our mission was to give parents and caregivers a break," Playhouse Cafe owner Larissa York said.

For parents and primary caregivers, whose child-rearing responsibilities can be at rewarding, stressful and lonely, the Playhouse Cafe offers a chance to savor a cup of coffee.

The coffeehouse, which opened in November, not only has kid-friendly food and drinks and miniature tables and chairs, but a "tot spot" play area, a supervised playroom for children ages 2 to 6 (child care is available for a fee) and programs such as yoga, massages and scrapbooking classes.

"I think it's a great place for parents to get together," said Kim Mehaffey of northern York County, a first-time mother of a newborn. "It's great to talk to moms who are going through the same thing."

"As a primary caregiver, you talk baby all day. It's maddening," York said. "You get so tired of kid places and kid colors."

The Playhouse Cafe's three owners use their professional backgrounds in accounting, writing and law to run the cafe. But it's their instincts and experiences as mothers that might prove most valuable.

"First of all, we knew there was a place like this that was needed," York said.

As a stay-at-home mom, York had trouble finding an establishment where the ambience was both youthful and mature, she said.

When designing each play area, the three women were mindful of the toys and activities that children enjoy and the security and safety measures that, as mothers, they would expect, she said.

Although it's nestled among businesses in Lemoine, the Playhouse Cafe, so far, has seen few of the business people, York said. They mainly see at-home mothers with their children and play groups. York estimates it sees about 20 children each day and three or four mom groups a week.

"They get to meet up with their play-group friends, and they don't destroy your house," York said. "They feel comfortable here."

"At other places, we feel like we're bothering everybody, we're shushing the kids," said Myra Gallardo, 37, of Hampden Twp. "But here, everybody has kids, and it's good."

About the Author

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