

Small business profile: Little Friends Music

By **Bob Tremblay**/ Daily News Staff
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As Lori Anderson York leads a group of young children in singing the Bouncing Song at Christ the King Lutheran Church, 3-year-old Madison Umlauf of Bellingham stands up and bounces to the beat of the music. At the song's conclusion, she takes an impromptu bow. Yes, a performer in the making.

Madison was at the Holliston church with her mother Meghan and 6-month-old brother Ethan for a demonstration class of Little Friends Music, York's new business that teaches music and movement to children 5-years-old and under.

"I like to dance," says Madison. "And I like to hear the noises."

For her mother, the class provides an educational opportunity. "Music is a great learning tool for kids," says Meghan Umlauf.

Nancy George of Medway bounces her 8-month-old son William on her lap during the song. "He loves to sway to the music," she says. "We want to encourage that and we want to expose him to music at an early age."

And that just happens to be York's goal.

"We're building listening skills, coordination, attention spans and imagination and developing fine motor skills when we use the instruments," says the Holliston resident. "Movement is really the children's first language and they learn through movement. They are learning body awareness and learning a lot through repetition. Repetition is really essential for a child's learning and the curriculum reflects that."

York also wants to get parents involved. "This is a time for parents and children to spend together to bond," she says. "We're also helping the parents to learn to make music part of their everyday lives and feel comfortable with that."

Little Friends Music gets under way this month with classes offered in Holliston, Hopkinton and Dover. The business seems a perfect fit for York, who received her bachelor's degree in music education from the University of New Hampshire and her master's degree in vocal performance from Northwestern University.

A member of the San Francisco Opera Chorus for seven years, she still performs and for the past six years has taught private voice lessons to middle and high school students and adults. She is also the mother of two young children, a 3 1/2-year-old son, Harrison, and a 15-month-old daughter, Amelia.

"I love music, I love children, I have a music education background and I wanted to bring that to the community," says York, in explaining why she started Little Friends Music. The classes also provide "a nice extension" of her voice lessons.

She has also participated in music classes with Harrison.

For her classes, York will be using a Musikgarten curriculum. Located in Greensboro, N.C., this early childhood music education company specializes in training teachers and York has been certified and licensed as a Musikgartgen instructor. Based on meeting the developmental needs of children as they grow, the curriculum covers children from birth to age nine. Classes introduce playful musical activities such as the bouncing song. York plays the role of coach while parents learn ways to play musically with their babies in their arms.

Children will also learn to play simple instruments such as wooden sticks and jingle bells. At Little Friends, they'll have the opportunity to participate in jam sessions, too. Record company executives, take notice.

Moving to the beat of songs, learning to keep rhythm, developing listening skills and singing songs are all part of the package.

York, who is a member of the Early Childhood Music and Movement Association, is offering two different classes: for children 3 and under and children ages 3 to 5. Classes for the younger children will be held Thursday mornings at 9:30 at the Enter Stage Left Theater, 30 Main St., in Hopkinton, starting Sept. 28, and Friday and Saturday mornings at 9:30 at Grace Church, 21 Centre St., in Dover, starting Sept. 22 and 23. Classes for the older children will be Wednesdays at 1:30 p.m. at the Dancing Arts Center, 9 Whitney St., in Holliston, starting Sept. 20.

Each class lasts 45 minutes with the program for the younger children running 10 weeks and costing \$155; the program for the older children runs 12 weeks and costs \$180. The fee includes materials such as a CD, a songbook and an instrument.

Little Friends Music is offering free sample classes Wednesday at the Dancing Arts Center and Saturday at Grace Church at 9:30 a.m. and Enter Stage Left during its 1-4 p.m. open house.

York says 12 parents so far have expressed interest in taking the classes.

"Children are never too young to be exposed to music," she says. "They're innately musical."

As her business grows, York would like to expand the curriculum to other age levels. She'd also like to start a babies-only class with children up to 18 months old.

While other companies provide music and movement classes for young children and other teachers offer the Musikgarten curriculum, York says her music education and performance background give her an edge.

"They help me as a teacher and as a leader of the class," she says. "And having two children helps me, too. I'm teaching classes that are at the age my children are at and I have an understanding of that.

"I love the idea of doing this," York continues. "I'm going to be able to use my education background, my performance background and my love of kids. It all comes together in this and I'm so excited. I think it's going to be loads of fun."

The classes are designed to be fun, too, says York. "And the children are learning at the same time. Parents like that," she says.

Ultimately, the classes become a family affair. "This is a way to bring music to your family and make it part of your family life," says York. "It's having quality time together. Your children don't care if you have a good voice. They just want to spend time with you."

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