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SILVER LAKE'S NEW DAY CARE

A place for little Joey to learn

BY DAVID GREENWALD

Silver Lake's youngest creative class has an exclusive new club to call home.

Wallaby, a bright, inviting family development center sandwiched between two auto repair shops on Hyperion Avenue, recently began its second semester of classes for children up to age 5 and their parents.

"The early education is a service that owner and Silver Lake resident Ericka Tullis, a former preschool teacher and mother of two, says was missing from the eastside neighborhood.

"It seems like there are a lot of families with young children over here and not really as many services as you would hope would be local to serve the families," she said.

Noting that there's been "a little bit of an outside baby boom" in recent years in a part of town better known for indie-rock concerts and vegan cafes than strollers and formula, Tullis opened Wallaby in September to fill the gap.

"With the recession, there's just been a lag in commercial ventures to serve these folks," she said. "It seemed like a good time to start something."

Through mostly word of mouth, parents have been drawn to its airy, organized interior and multifaceted weekly classes, which allow for free play as well as music, movement and art in a kind of "mini-preschool."

"I think it's the only place of its kind," said Lexi Brown, a Koreatown mom, at a recent class. "There isn't a place that's structured the way this is with the organized classes that's not a preschool."

So far, Wallaby has been a largely local affair, with many of its teachers



Photos by KALA ROA Staff Photographer

Healthy learner: Twenty-month-old Chase Haden plays with plastic fruits at Wallaby day care in Los Angeles. Wallaby has been open since September.



Coloring outside the lines: Clara Fedak, 18 months, left, and Maya Gonzalez, 22 months, sit at the table and paint at Wallaby day care.

and participants living in the area — even, in that rarest of L.A. achievements, within walking distance.

"We actually live in the neighborhood and saw that it was opening the next week, so it was sort of a walk-in type of thing," said Josh Haden, father and frontman of L.A. rock band Spain, as his wife and son played. "The places like this that are equivalent are further away. We used to go to one in Pasadena — it was good but it wasn't as good as this; it wasn't as personal."

Despite the rock star, Wallaby's thirty-something clientele seems a far cry from the style-obsessed "hipster parents" and "cool dads" who've come under fire from the New York Times and the satiric blog Hipster Ransoff, among others, in recent years.

"It's not like a bunch of people with tattoos and piercings coming in with their kids dressed like teenagers or something," Tullis said. "They probably look mostly like the way other parents look in other parts of L.A. All of our families are really lovely people, really educated, really progressive-minded, really interested in doing things that are fun and good for their kids."

What is not to say Wallaby's parents have thrown out their artistic sides along with yesterday's diapers. Though it may not outdrive the Silverlake Lounge any time soon, the venue will give kids an early exposure to the local music scene, with kid-centric Silver Lake set Lucky Diaz and the Jam Band playing a live show there on Sunday with more to follow.

Men guitar classes are also among the enrollment options for parents, and Tullis hopes Wallaby can serve their needs along with those of their children.

"The idea is you can be a great parent and have interests of your own outside of just things that are exclusively for your children," she said.

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Wallaby

Where: 1835 Hyperion Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90027; (323) 642-0128

Where: Classes are offered by semester; drop-in hours are held Mondays, 10 a.m. - noon and 3-5 p.m. Tuition is approximately \$28 an hour. Visit www.wallaby-la.com for more details.