



## **Widening the circle**

Parents Club, launched by former members of Moms Club, invites all kinds of families into the mix.

By Cindy Frazier

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Some say it takes a village to raise a child, and members of the newly formed Laguna Beach Parents Club would probably agree with that. The club was launched in September by former members of the Laguna Beach Moms Club who wanted to take the family-oriented group in a more inclusive direction.

The Moms Club is a national organization geared toward stay-at-home mothers in traditional nuclear families. Stay-at-home dads, working mothers or same-gender moms and dads need not apply.

The Moms Club is designed to give mothers who are isolated at home a sense of community that otherwise would be lacking, said Kris Thornton, a mother of three boys who has been involved with the club for years.

But many of Laguna's eclectic and alternative mix of family units were unable to enjoy the advantages of a club geared to help parents with young children.

"We wanted to open it [the club] up to all types of families," said Kim Duensing, one of three steering committee members who helped launch the Parents Club.

After seven years in Laguna Beach, the final break came when the Moms Club national leaders insisted that there be three different clubs in Laguna Beach.

This didn't sit well with the Laguna organizers, who wanted to be able to get all the families together for various activities and fundraisers.

"There were two [Moms Club] groups, and we wanted to join together," Thornton said. "We were denied. So the Moms Club disbanded."

"Laguna Beach only needs one club, because it is a tight-knit community," Thornton added.

But the Parents Club organizers are grateful to the Moms Club for spawning the Laguna-centric organization.

"They gave us a base from which to grow," said Christa Henry, another steering committee member. "We are now open to same-gender couples and single-parent families."

Foster parents or others responsible for unrelated children may join, and expectant parents are also included.

"Anyone who finds themselves in a parenting role is welcome," Thornton said.



With its new mission and a larger pool of potential members, the Parents Club held a kickoff picnic in September that drew more than 100 people.

The club now has 50 paid members -- dues are \$30 a year for each family -- and organizers expect some 150 families to eventually join, based on the 175 who joined the club's Yahoo online group.

The Parents Club offers an array of activities for children and parents of children of all ages, including mom and dad "nights out," a coffee club, book club and couples nights. There are fitness walks that turn into a "stroller brigade" at Heisler Park, play groups, field trips and guest speakers.

The steering committee plans to organize a baby-sitting cooperative that will allow members to swap baby-sitting services.

A website, designed by Henry, gives the lowdown on what's happening in the parent scene in town.

One unusual personal service the club provides is home-cooked meals for new parents, since many don't have families in town, according to the organizers.

The meals aren't just a way to tide the new parents over during the hectic time of having a new baby in the house.

"They make you feel a part of the community, and give that feeling of connectedness," said Thornton.

The club also serves as a sort of welcome wagon for new families who need information on schools, businesses that offer special services and a sense of community.

"We cater to parents whose kids aren't in school, but we hope it [the club] evolves to include older families," said Henry, whose own daughter is two.

One thing the Laguna club excels at is fundraising. As the Moms Club, the membership raised \$15,000 to help a local youth shelter and another \$25,000 to aid tsunami victims.

When two of the former Moms Club members had homes damaged in the June 1 landslide, yet more money -- \$20,000 -- was raised to help them out.

"When we see a need, we fill a need," said Thornton. "We want to have fun, and get people together."

**Information: [lagunabeachparents.com](http://lagunabeachparents.com)**

**DON LEACH / COASTLINE PILOT(LA)Kim Duensing, left, Christa Henry and Kris Thornton are leaders in the new Parents Club of Laguna. Top, the club gathers together for a Halloween parade on Oct. 28.**