



## **Endeavors of the Heart**

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A Village Clubhouse

*By Lee Winocur Field and Marion Jacobs*

If it takes a village to raise a child, then kids with a mom or dad in Laguna's Parents Club are definitely in the right place. This thriving organization, dedicated to the welfare of Laguna's youngest residents, infants to 5-year-olds, began just five years ago. Starting with 50 families, the group has built a tight-knit community of 242 families. That's about a third of the town's families with children of this age range.

Creating a village atmosphere in which to raise a child takes dedication. What is essential is good communication, frequent interaction, and involvement of the entire community. The Parent's Club accomplishes this by holding weekly play-dates in the park, monthly evening meetings and social events for the parents and events for the entire family. Their website calendar lists their activities and an interactive message board encourages sharing tips on everything from parenting problems to where to find a good plumber.

The group began as an outgrowth of Mom's Club International, which had been active in Laguna for many years. The Mom's groups catered to traditional families and had very strict rules for participation, including a limit of 30 members per group, no same-gender families and no stay-at-home dads. But times, families and child-raising has changed.

Jill Espinola-Fletcher, the club's co-president, parenting in Laguna is now more often a shared responsibility, met by slightly older, well-educated parents who have deliberately decided to raise a family as well as continue to build careers. Dads are now actively involved in child care, and an increasing number are stay-at-home dads.

One full-time caregiver, Greg Collins, who moved here with his partner two years ago, says, "Joining the club provided an instant community."

Michael Beresford agrees. "I never thought of this as a networking tool, but being a business owner I've also been able to meet some great people who are business owners that share the same passion for success."

Pushing her 4-year-old daughter Tessa in a swing at Riddle Field, Espanola-Fletcher explained that although the LBPC focus is on the 313 children they serve, the group nurtures the entire family. Their book discussion group and monthly evening parent meetings include speakers on topics such as emotional intelligence, cognitive development and nutrition, and 10 family field-trips further solidify group cohesion. Next January, the group will host a forum on local private and public schools.



Open to all families who live, work or have children in Laguna Beach schools, the club sets the cost of membership low, only \$40 per year. They add to their coffers by through their sponsorship program. Through their Parent's Perks Program members receive discounts at 30 local businesses. Their grass-roots popularity has elicited inquiries from as far away as Florida from groups hoping to duplicate the club's success, Espanola-Fletcher reports.

As the youngsters grow-up, families must graduate out of the group, but Espanola- Fletcher sees a time when the age limits will be expanded. "We feel a responsibility to our families to keep the dialogue going and to keep them well informed."

She adds, "The city of Laguna is a fantastic place to raise a family. Young families are moving here for that very reason. We feel the city is changing. Laguna is slowly becoming more family focused and more kid friendly, and the LBPC is helping the city through this transition."

Greg Collins succinctly sums up what it means to live in a village. "In a close community like Laguna Beach, we all need to be in this parenting thing together."

To learn more about the Parent's Club, call 949-497-3203 or visit their website at [www.lagunabeachparents.com](http://www.lagunabeachparents.com).

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\*\*\*NOTE – there were a few typographic errors in the article. These have been fixed in this version of the article.