



Family Ties

(Published September 2009 in Laguna Beach Magazine)

Where do you want to raise your kids? Where do you want to grow up as a kid? Having all the requisites—good schools, safe neighborhoods, top child care, fun things to do—is only half the picture. What most families really want when they set down roots is to have that network of friends and folks who provide lifelong memories and lasting connections. People indeed find these relationships here in Laguna Beach.

Often touted as the “Mayberry of the West,” Laguna Beach is about as close to a small town as you can get in these parts. If it takes a village to raise a child, Laguna takes its village pedigree seriously. A family-centric town, countless residents can recall neighbors reaching out to one another in a time of need. When the going gets tough—from canyon fires to wintertime floods to the Bluebird Canyon slide—fellow residents don’t hesitate to help out when needed.

Serterre Properties founder Paula Wilhelm knows firsthand that small-town assistance when her house in her Top of the World neighborhood burned five years ago. All her neighbors pitched in, offering shelter, clothes and sympathy. “We had no qualms about rebuilding in the neighborhood,” says Paula. We didn’t want to live anywhere else. It’s always been a great place to live. We have potluck dinners twice a year in the cul-de-sac, where we project a movie onto one of the houses. We are all so busy in our daily lives and the potluck nights help us all reconnect.”

And in good times, Laguna does it even one better. The town has its own parents club with plenty of family-oriented activities. The club was a huge help when local mom Laura Blossey had her twins two and a half years ago. “Growing up in Laguna for our kids means making crafts together and delivering them to seniors, outings to the local Marine Mammal Center or fire station, or the annual summer hot dog barbecue in the park. Growing up in Laguna means waving and chatting with other families at the Farmer’s Market, the beaches and parks, and at schools and other activities, where we can all make a positive difference in our own and other kids’ lives because our families have had strong, consistent interactions with each other over numerous years. It makes a difference, and it’s a good one!”

In this issue, you’ll discover a Laguna made expressly for the junior family members, with a listing of top sites and experiences for the family all over town. You’ll also find a spotlight on some of the town’s finest educators and why they enjoy teaching our children well. We’ve also taken you into the brand-new destination store that opened earlier this summer and is going to blow away anyone young (and young at heart) with it’s lineup of sweet gear. And if you want to experience a true endless summer, check out our fashion layout with groms of Laguna’s beaches.

Jessica Drew de Paz, who feels fortunate to raise her son Gabriel in Laguna Beach, sums up how Laguna really cares about its younger residents: “We stroll to Riddle Field but take a detour to chat with the ‘motorcycle man,’” says Jessica. “Later, we stop by PCH Cleaners to pick up our dry cleaning. [Owner] Yen can’t believe how big Gabe is getting—his baby picture hangs on her



wall. Being out and about provides many opportunities to interact with one another, giving Laguna that small-town feel.” Small-town benefits surrounded by big-time beauty and glorious opportunity. Not a bad place to grow up, no matter what your age.

-Maria C. Reeve