

Child enrichment center may open here

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By Monica Haynes and Cristina Rouvalis, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

CosmiKids, a Hollywood-based child enrichment center that has nurtured child stars, is planning to open a center in Pittsburgh, the first one outside of Southern California.

Judy Julin, a native of Baldwin Borough who moved to California in 2002, will present her plan for a Pittsburgh franchise at a reception for potential investors from 6 to 9 tonight at the Sonoma Grill, Downtown.

Also in town is former "Twin Peaks" actress Sherilyn Fenn, who's filming a documentary about Ms. Julin and CosmiKids.

CosmiKids is a program for children of all ages and their parents, using play to instill values such as self esteem, cooperation and tolerance. The center has many stations, including Costume Improv and Showtime, and Water Thoughts, where children can decorate a water bottle with positive affirmations. In the "Minds on Mother Earth," kids and their parents write a letter of thanks to Mother Earth, make animal masks and explore the world of crystals.

"Think of Cirque Du Soleil meets Mister Rogers meets Gymboree," Ms. Julin said. "We view the child as the teacher."

Home schoolers and their parents can also spend time together here, and it will offer birthday parties with noncompetitive games and healthy snacks. Senior citizens also play with kids at this multi-generational center. Each 90 minute session costs \$14.40 per person.

Ms. Julin expects a Pittsburgh center to open in 2007 possibly in the South Hills or Cranberry. She said she has someone interested in a franchise.

In Los Angeles, child stars including Hunter Allan and Darcy Rose Byrnes have played at the CosmiKids center in Hollywood.

Ms. Fenn said in an interview yesterday that she was drawn to the documentary project because of Ms. Julin's unique approach to business.



Annie O'Neill, Post-Gazette
Actress Sherilyn Fenn, left, of "Twin Peaks" fame, is making a documentary about Pittsburgher Judy Julin, right, and the CosmiKids program she started in Los Angeles.

"She does her business with kindness, compassion, treating everyone the same way," she said.

Her approach is a combination of play and working called "plorking" pronounced "plurking," according to Ms. Fenn.

Ms. Julin "believes this is a new context into which people can be doing business," Ms. Fenn said. "We're allowed to play when we're kids, but when you're a grown-up it's all over, and I think that's sad and I think that's unnecessary."

In order to document Ms. Julin and her approach, Ms. Fenn said she needed to understand who she is and where she has come from.

"Judy is so committed to CosmiKids it was important to pull out of the element and get back to home, visit certain places and share certain memories," she said.

Ms. Fenn learned about CosmiKids through a friend of the actress's mother.

Ms. Fenn's mother began telling the friend, Gail Torr, about her daughter's interest in documentaries and children.

Ms. Torr had been doing publicity for CosmiKids and put Ms. Fenn in touch with Ms. Julin.

"I got on the Web at cosmikids.org and was thrilled as a mother and as a filmmaker," Ms. Fenn said. She and Ms. Julin met on a Saturday and she began working on the film the following Monday.

The actress/filmmaker is not sure whether her film will end up in theaters, on cable or on the festival circuit.

"My focus right now," she said, "is to make the best little piece I can make."

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