

Business of Parenting

Created by parents, for parents

New Place to Play in Manhattan

By Judy Antell

When you live in Manhattan with your children, you feel a sense of ownership with 'your' playground. This is the place you visit on almost a daily basis, where both you and your kids make friends. Families in the Flatiron District now have a new indoor playground, **apple seeds**, opening later this month.

Created by two local moms, *Allison Schlanger* and *Alien Qualter Berna*, both mothers of twins, the concept of **apple seeds** is to provide everything a parent of an infant to 5-year-old needs for entertainment. In addition to the playground, there are seven classrooms offering music, science, yoga, cooking, art and dance classes. There is a small library where you can browse the latest parenting books while your child enjoys a board book. A café, a boutique, and a birthday party space round out the offerings.

Families will really feel this play-



The Bernas (left), the Schlangers (right)

ground is 'theirs' because they have to be members to use it (non-members can still book a birthday party, take a class or eat at the café). The play-

ground, designed by the same creators of "Playworks" at the Children's Museum of Manhattan, features a "New York City" theme, with sky-

scrapers that kids can build, a deli, and a cab. There is a special tot area, with soft cushions and pull-up bars with mirrors.

Parental comfort has been kept in mind, with plenty of seating — a half-wall runs along the back, where parents whose kids want to play 'alone' can perch on a stool and read the paper or check email (apple seeds has Wi-Fi throughout) while keeping an eye on their kids. There is also a 'lifeguard' at all times, helping parents and caregivers keep watch.

Since the two owners feel safety and cleanliness are paramount, there are Purell dispensers throughout the playground, and an environmental cleaning service cleans throughout the day. And anyone toilet training a toddler will appreciate the bathrooms, which include tiny toddler toilets. The café, which is scheduled to

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open in May, will be a nut-free facility, and careful attention will be paid to choosing foods that don't present a choking hazard.

Schlanger and Berna forged a friendship when they met trying to squeeze double strollers into an elevator on the way to music class. Taking a class at **apple seeds** is much simpler. There is an automatic door (so you don't have to do the body-twisting 'door hold & stroller push'), a ramp, and a stroller check. And since the two women liked to take their kids out to eat after class, and couldn't find a restaurant that had four high chairs, they promise plenty of kid seating at their café. There will be weekend and evening classes to accommodate working parents.

Many parents with two kids of different ages run into a problem when the older child is taking a class, and the younger one is just along for the ride. At **apple seeds**, that younger child can play in the playground while the older child is at a drop-off class. And after class, kids can hang out with their new friends in the playground together.

Schlanger, a television producer and teacher before motherhood, has worked closely to develop class content. *Little Maestros* and *Music Together* will offer music classes at the new facility. Berna was also a TV producer, and worked at UNICEF.

Both moms talk about building a sense of community; their hope is that parents will want time at **apple seeds**, more than just the 45 minutes of class, to meet and make friends.

The play space is a true family affair as it turns out. The women and their husbands are all co-founders. Craig Schlanger is the CFO, and Robert Berna lends his business expertise. Their children, Sam and Ari Schlanger and Madeleine and Sydney Berna, are all under 3, so they look forward to years of playing at **apple seeds**.

Classes begin mid-March. **apple seeds** may branch out into sponsoring readings by local children's book authors, and seminars and classes for parents are planned. A full membership costs \$750 year, limited charter memberships are currently available at a \$100 discount.

The facility is located at 10 West 25th Street. For more information, call (347) 306-4114 or go to www.applesedstny.com.