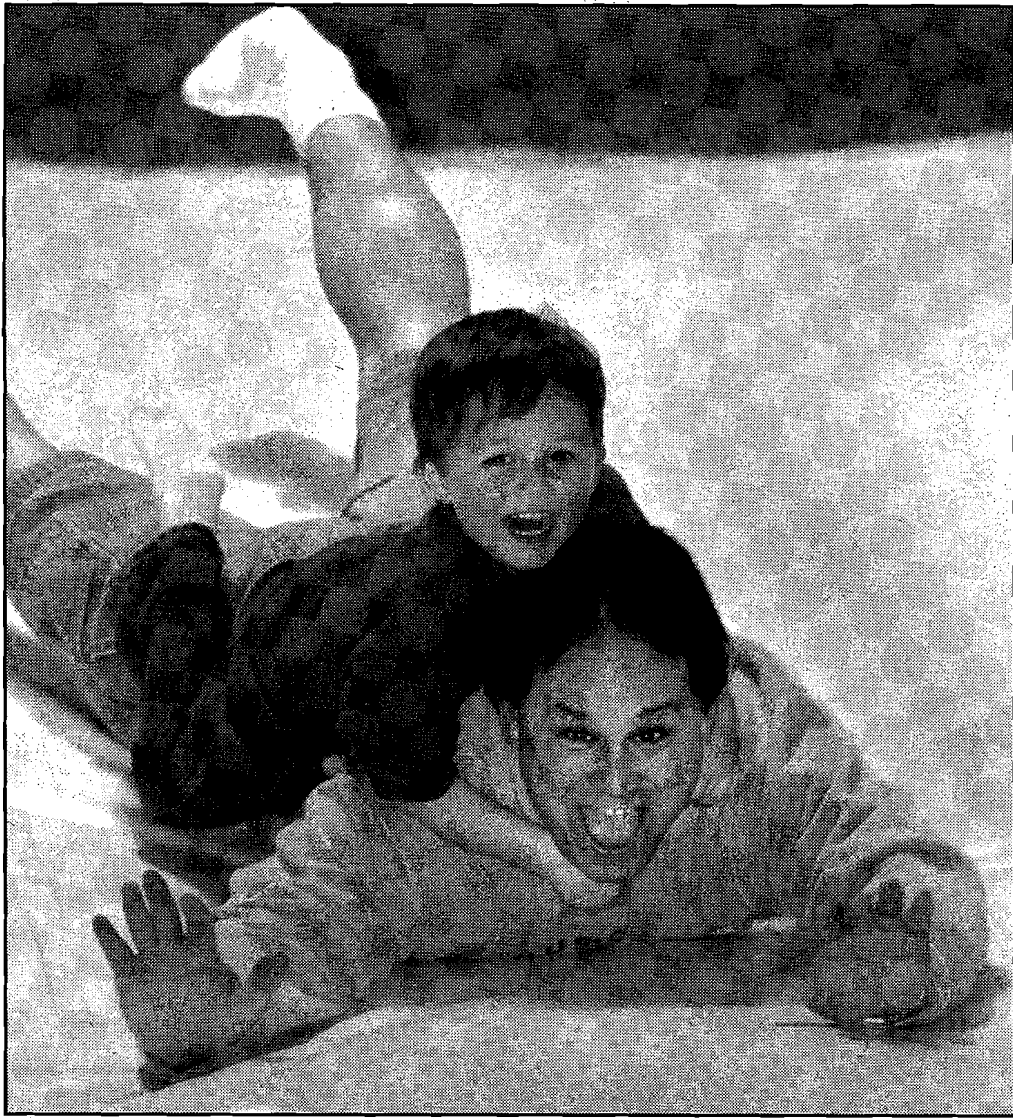


# Sliding, bouncing into inflatable business world



**SHARON DIENER**, left, owner of Scooter's Jungle in Placentia, helps one of her charges clamber up a fabric ladder during a recent birthday party. At far left, Paul DeMarco and son Connor, 6, whiz down a bouncy slide at inflatable family entertainment center.

Story by Patrick Vuong, Photos by Stan Bird / Placentia News-Times

**H**idden in the deep southeast corner of Placentia's industrial and commercial district lies a jungle waiting to be explored.

But in this tropical forest, the flora consists of potted plants and vine-print carpeting. And the most vicious inhabitants? Nothing more than the soft, stuffed monkeys hanging inside a display case.

Welcome to Scooter's Jungle, Placentia's newest family entertainment center.

Opened in January, the facility's main attractions are the custom-designed, inflatable plastic play areas — some enclosed, some not — that stretch up to 25 feet high and are designed for special events, such as kids' birthday parties.

"We know Nintendo has gotten out of control, so we wanted kids to stay active," owner Sharon Diener said. "We wanted to keep their legs busy."

Customers who trek into Scooter's are soon moving more than their legs — zipping down the 20-foot-high pneumatic slide, imitating Tarzan in the rope-swing play yard or grabbing some sky in the trampoline-like bounce house.

There are also Foosball, air hockey and pingpong tables, plus the Super-Ball Dome, a room where kids can chuck little bouncy rubber balls to their hearts' content without fear of losing the spheres.

Diener, who has owned a printing company for 15 years, said the idea of offering kids of all ages a place to have a safe yet active environment for their private parties stemmed from her own passion for setting up elaborate events for her own sons, ages 8 and 10.

"I've always been obsessed with my kids' birthdays," she said, "so it was kind of turning my obsession into something productive."

Combining her own experiences planning birthday parties with her business savvy, Diener has planted the seeds for a growing business she believes meets the needs of the surrounding area.

The Laguna Hills resident said Scooter's — classified as a family entertainment center in the inflatable industry — fills a void between rental bounce houses and video game-focused facilities such as Chuck E. Cheese.

"The reason we opened in Placentia was mainly because of the demographics," Diener said. "We have a lot of friends and family up here, and it was obvious there was a need here. A lot of parents will thank us for giving them another choice."

Mission Viejo resident Todd McLaughlin recently held his daughter's birthday party at Scooter's after he and Mackenzie, 8, attended a friend's party there in March.

"It was great," he said. "My

"Mind Your Business" is an occasional Placentia News-Times feature dedicated to showcasing businesses owned by local residents. To suggest topics for stories, call reporter Patrick Vuong at (714) 704-3796 or e-mail pvuong@ocregister.com.

This month's business is:  
**What:** Scooter's Jungle  
**Where:** 921 Via Rodeo  
**What's it about:** Family entertainment center with inflatable playground  
**Call:** (714) 223-5730.

daughter enjoyed it so much she wanted to come back."

"I like it a lot because you get to jump in a bouncy house and you get to play a lot," Mackenzie said. "And you get to play a lot of games and get to swing across like you're a monkey."

Scooter's is just one element of an industry that has gained in popularity across the country in recent years, said Benjamin Moseley, chairman of the International Inflatable Products and Games Association based in Orlando, Fla.

"An estimate for the (family entertainment center) type of inflatable is hard to figure today but is probably the fastest area that this business is growing," said Moseley, who is also editor-in-chief of Inflatable News, a trade publication.

"With more than 14,000 rental companies, parks and schools, military, fund-raising and advertising, we are only now coming to understand just how large this industry is."

Though Scooter's target audience is ages 4 to 11, Diener said adults and seniors are drawn to the inflatable playground as well, while they might lose interest at a video arcade.

"They get bored at some of the other places," she said, "so they're very excited about (participating)."

Even an 81-year-old grandfather got into the bouncy act, gliding and tumbling around the area, Diener said.

"He did the slide, he did the rope swing, he did the whole room," she said. "So that was very impressive."

The center's tropical forest theme was borne out of a trip Diener and her husband, Scott, took in the jungles of Bali, located on an Indonesian archipelago.

"We loved it; it was great," she said. "We stayed in the jungle the whole time."

But the Scooter's Jungle name had less exotic origins: It was named after Scott Diener's college nickname.

Each private party lasts 2½ hours and can accommodate about 22 kids — at an average of 100 parties a month.

The jungle tour first begins with a check-in and safety review.

"We are very strict about safety," Diener said, "because it's very important to us."

She added engineers routinely inspected the custom-built inflatable equipment to ensure the safety of all.

After the review of the jungle rules, the party-goers spend an hour and a half in the pneumatic playground before spending the last 45 minutes in the party room, where they can munch on pizza.

There's also a throne for the birthday boy or girl can sit on while wearing a crown and opening up his or her presents.

Despite being in operation for only a few months, Diener said Scooter's Jungle has already attracted many "tourists."

"The reason for the growth and profitable nature of it is that it is a great business for part-time, young and older operators without prior experience," Moseley said.

"It is the type of business that can be operated by a husband and wife very easily."

He estimates that the number of companies is growing by 10 percent to 15 percent annually in the last few years.

"We're doing very well and we're meeting our goals already," Diener said.

"We're considering expanding in the future" into other parts of Orange County.