

The New Family Clubs—They're All The Rage

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CITIBABES

Any mom will tell you that motherhood - especially at the first - is wonderful, but also quite isolating. I can only take so much of Maisie's incessant - albeit adorable - babbling. Now and then, I just need to talk to an adult.

And so I cozy up to other new moms in all sorts of places. Sometimes I worry that I'm a little too desperate, like a smarmy guy sidling up to a bar fly with a bad opening line. "What your son's name?" is almost as uninspired as, "What's your major?" in college.

Making friends is a big part of the reason I joined **Citibabes**, a club for families that opened in September in Scarsdale right next to the train station on Popham Road. Every time I walk in the door, I see a familiar face. There's just something really nice about having a community to call my own. None of the moms have turned

into my best friend. Besides having an adult conversation on occasion is as good as a Calgon bath.

Sure, there are other indoor playgrounds like Jumpin' Jeepers in Mahopac or Leapin' Lizards in Port Chester, but Citibabes is the only club of its kind in the whole county (though there is a sister club in Soho). What makes it different is that it's a private, members-only club for the whole family, even dads. I can spend time in the adult gym while Maisie plays on the really great indoor playground or in the playroom with a babysitter ("child-minders") watching. The club has seasonal events like Halloween plays and holiday parties. There are parenting seminars and cocktail parties where I can doll up and feel like I have a semblance of a social life again. For Maisie, there is a huge array of classes and they even have a school for when she gets older.

Right now, Maisie and I are taking a class called "Bandmates" which has not one, but three, multi-talented instructors. They pass out all sorts of instruments like drums and maracas so the kids can be a part of the band. Sometimes they include a parachute or a tunnel or scarves. Every class is different. I fully expect her to be the next Mozart at this rate though I wonder if a fare of The Monkees music and the like will do it. Eventually, she can take Suzuki there as well if she wants so that may do the trick.

They have several classrooms where they teach art, foreign languages, dance and, yes, even pilates for kids. I think we'll steer clear of pilates. I kind of like Maisie's pop belly. Plus, it's never good when your kid's abs are better than your own. The one thing I'm not a big fan of is the club's gym classes for kids, but only because they don't have true gym equipment.

When I first joined, I was really pumped about the place even though the membership is really steep at \$2,100 plus classes which are about \$400 a semester My husband thought I was out of my gourd and, for a while there, so did I. In the Fall, we barely went - who wants to be indoors when you can go apple picking or watch a tractor pull? But now that's it so darn cold outside, I find Maisie more often than not staring me in the eye, challenging me to find something to entertain her. Citibabes to the rescue.... and here's the best news of all: membership has dropped to \$1,400 plus a \$150 credit towards February classes - if you join by the end of February. And original members got a refund. Wahoo!

KIDVILLE

Kidville (www.kidville.com <<http://www.kidville.com>>) is another new place that opened last month which also happens to be in Scarsdale. Quite frankly, I find it amazingly ironic that even though we have an entire county full of bored kiddos, many clubs seem to be in Scarsdale. The Little Gym which is another absolutely fantastic place to take gym classes (my personal gym favorite actually) is in the very same parking lot at Kidville. It's near the AP Fresh on 22, just up the street from Lord & Taylor. Lucky for me, I live in southern Westchester so I'm golden, but I still think it seems a bit nuts. Why not spread the wealth and open a new place a bit more north?

Like Citibabes, Kidville also bills itself as a membership club, but it's a very different kind of place and doesn't really feel like a club to me at all. For starters, there is no membership fee to join. If you sign up for a class, you're a Silver member. It's that simple. You can upgrade for \$195 to Gold membership or for about a hundred bucks more to Platinum membership. The upgrades get you all sorts of freebies like discounts off of class enrollment or birthday parties.

Kidville is a fairly successful franchise and it's strength is in the wide variety of classes it offers. You name it, this place teaches it. The classes run \$545 each. Gulp. At this rate, Maisie is going to have to get a job. (Anybody need a 16-month-old kid who can make a mess? She charges \$100 an hour, but she's very good). Of course, the difference is that there's no steep membership fee like Citibabes. Then again, there are also no cafe or other place to hang out at "the club."

Simply, there are two, large, very well-equipped activity rooms at Kidville and a retail area, as well. The main room is filled with a huge variety of fabulous gym equipment for kids to hone their motor skills. Maisie took a trial class here called Big Muscle Builders which she absolutely loved. The other room is for music and art classes where they teach Little Maestros which the club's music class with four instructors. It's won all sorts of awards and is being touted as the best music class out there. There is no indoor playground, but when the main room isn't in use, kids can climb on the gym equipment for \$10 a pop. If you buy an upgraded membership, you get several passes.

So you ask, which is better -- Citibabes or Kidville? That's like asking which is better - steak or lobster. It all depends on what you like. My guess? You'll be happy with either.