

Have your little ones worn you out? Help has finally arrived

"Where can we take him to wear him out?"

My wife and I ask ourselves this question daily with our 5-year-old son, T.J. There's always a point where his manic activity turns from cute to cumbersome.

If this makes us bad parents, then the entire town should be reported to Child Services. We're all in the same boat.



OVER MEDIUM
Tim Wood

Our parents just said, "Go outside and don't come home until you're tired."

Today, we're a little more paranoid, and with good reason. That leads us to schedule play dates to try to give each other mutual relief, but it's temporary and sporadic.

Now, we finally have a tried and true answer to the question.

Jennifer Edwards is our savior. She has lived our plight. She has two little boys, 4-year-old Caden and 6-year-old Jackson.

The exercise physiologist has a following in the Low-country with her Once Upon a Workout and Stroller Fitness programs.

Now, she's about to be a bona fide cult hero and she doesn't even know it.

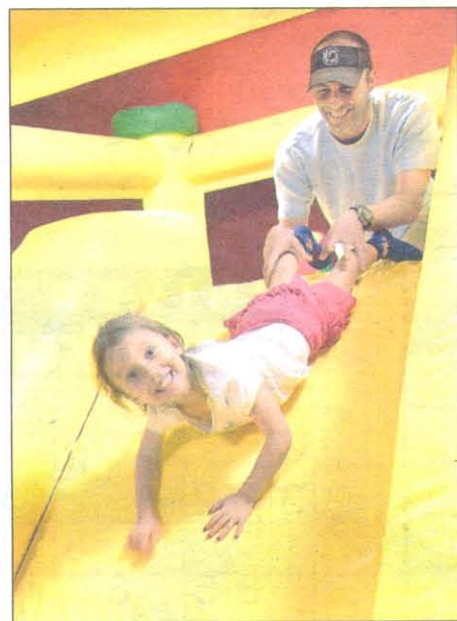
On Monday, Edwards opened Island Playground, a 6,000-square-foot nirvana for the Red Bull-sweating kiddies and the parents who birthed them.

"I would tell my parent friends about what I was planning and the reaction was always the same. 'How soon can you build it?' That's when I knew I was on to something," Edwards said.

Oh, you're on to something



▲ Jennifer Edwards is the owner and operator of the new Island Playground in Bridge Center.



◀ Ryan Witte plays with his daughter, Reese, 5, on one of the bouncy slides at Island Playground.

Photos by Stephen Berend/Bluffton Today

all right. When I walked in the place, I felt like Edwards had covered every possible want.

There's a creative play section, called the Imagination Stations, that include a giant fairy tale castle with two slides. Inside the castle is a puppet theater and a seemingly endless supply of king, queen and prince costumes for the kids to pretend in.

There's also a grocery store section with cash registers and carts; a "Dino Dig" where kids can dig through plastic mulch for dinosaur bones; and a block building and wooden train play area.

After your kid is done

stretching his or her imagination, it's on to the inflatables.

We're talking a 20-foot double slide with a climbing area in the middle, a bouncy house/basketball court hybrid and an obstacle course.

All the inflatables are built so parents can play along with their kids.

Most parents I saw on Monday were sitting on the couches or in the picnic area, sipping coffee, watching the flat-screen TV or surfing the Internet on their laptops, thanks to the free WiFi.

All of them had the same giddy smile on their face, an expression of glee and relief

I've often heard of but rarely experienced in my five years of parenting.

No, really, it's not a mirage, people. This place really exists. It's in Bridge Center. If you're coming from the island, you'll need to turn around at the Moss Creek light. It's a small price to pay for such liberation.

This magical edifice has open all-day play six days a week (Saturdays, call ahead; if there are no parties, there will be open play) from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Thursday, until 9 p.m. on Friday and noon to 5 p.m. on Sunday. It costs \$5.95 for kids 2 and younger (they get their own little dragon inflatable section) and \$8.95 for kids 3 and older.

Take the kiddies to lunch and bring them back for no additional charge. And parents aren't charged to get in, unlike other play places.

Edwards said there's "Mommy and Me" play sessions under way, a five-week program of 45-minute Ballet N' Play, Create N' Play and Fit N' Play sessions.

Then, on June 2, summer camp begins. You can leave your child for \$25 a day or \$18 for a half-day of activities.

Edwards said they will have their summer camp area completed in the coming weeks, adding 2,000 square feet to the building.

Then there's the birthday party possibilities. Have 10 of your kids' friends in to play, either with the Open Play crowd or rent the place out for a private party.

Schools can use the facility for fundraising, where a portion of the days' proceeds go to the school. Read all about it at www.island-playground.com

Don't worry about sanitation. Edwards' husband works for Purell, so there are clean-

ing stations all over the place and kids are required to wear socks (less germs that way).

Listen, I have no affiliation with Edwards. I met her on Monday. I'm so effusive because I felt like I was in the presence of the parents' Dalai Lama — like she had given me instant enlightenment, a path to sane fatherhood.

And I'm not alone. Word of mouth has spread so quickly that the place was chock full of kids on Monday.

Shawna Fisher came from Hilton Head Island with her two daughters, 2-year-old Addison and 3-year-old Alexandra. She has taken Edwards' Stroller Fitness classes. The sessions opened up a whole new circle of friends for her.

"Now I'm watching the same thing happen with the kids. It's amazing to see them meet a kid and just start playing castle with them," Fisher said.

Ryan Witte had that look as well. The Bluffton parent was there with his 5-year-old daughter, Reese.

As she rolled in the inflatables, I asked her what activity she liked the most.

"Everything! I just love it, love it, love it!" Reese said. Dad gave the same answer.

"She's tried on every outfit, been on every slide. I ... I mean she can't get enough of this place," he said. "They're going to need more room here. Every parent I know is going to be here."

I'm with you, Ryan. I have found the place that will wear T.J. out.

Now, my only question is, "Why didn't I think of this place first?"

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