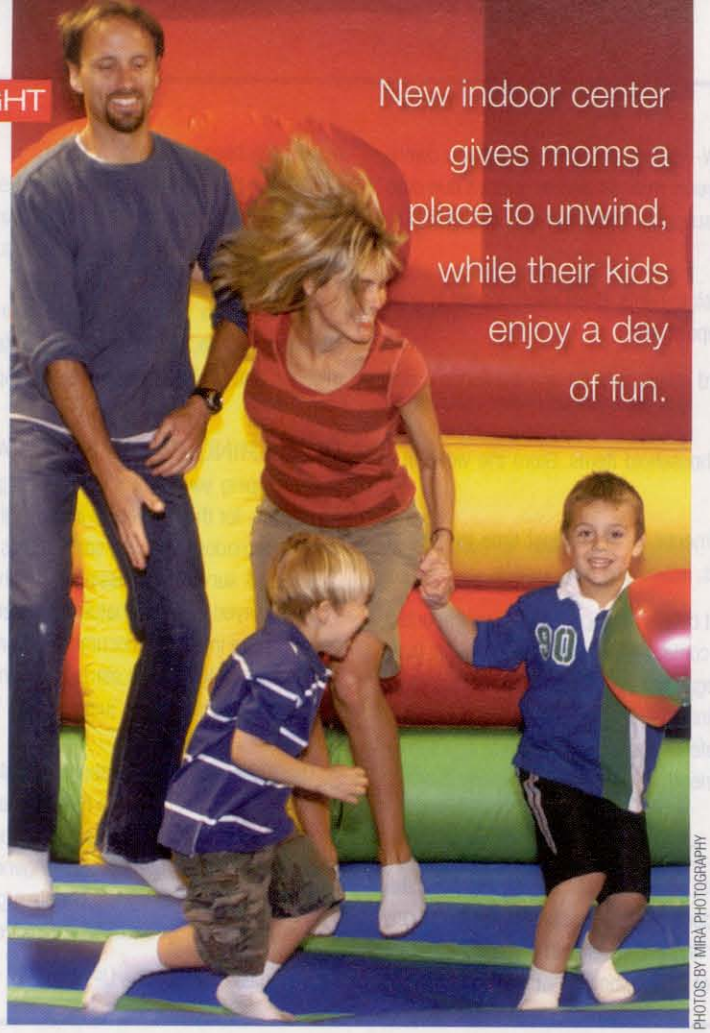

New indoor center gives moms a place to unwind, while their kids enjoy a day of fun.

PHOTOS BY MIRÀ PHOTOGRAPHY

Recess Is IN

By Teresa Fitzgibbons

Would you and your child enjoy an afternoon of digging for dinosaur bones, defending a castle, creating an artistic masterpiece, conquering an obstacle course and sliding down a two story slide?

Whether your child is a budding artist, a future fitness buff, or a little of both, they're sure to find adventure at Island Playground, the area's first climate-controlled indoor playground – a place where the imagination can run wild.

"Island Playground is all about exercising children's minds and bodies," said owner Jennifer Edwards. "We've devoted about half our space to active play and half to creative play with activities for children with different interests."

The Imagination Stations are as varied as the children who enjoy them. They include a 10-by-20-foot, two-story castle, complete with dress-up clothes, two slides and a puppet theater, a Dino Dig Station where future paleontologists can dig through mulch and chips to excavate "dinosaur bones and other prehistoric artifacts," a pretend grocery store and chef's station with plenty of costumes and props, as well as a Thomas the Train Station and a Creative Artists' Nook with art supplies.

A large active play area with brightly colored bouncers and other inflatables, including a giant twenty foot high double slide and an obstacle course, with tunnels and slides to tackle, also await eager young ones – and their parents!

"It's really an active way to exercise," said Edwards. "We want parents to get out there and play with their kids. They're allowed on the inflatables; in fact, we encourage them. There are also plenty of things for toddlers to explore. There are even activities for babies who are crawling."

There's also a Toddler Exploration Area featuring ocean-themed inflatables with tunnels and climbers, a soft-play gymnastics area, ride on toys, and other age-appropriate playthings.

When the Toddler Exploration Area is complete, Island Playground will offer nearly 8,000 square feet of adventure (and plenty of Purell Stations to prevent the spread of germs) along with a picnic area where families and friends can enjoy the healthy snacks available for purchase, host a party or unwind after playing.

Island Playground is equally appealing to parents, who, along with children that are carried, pay no admission. They can enjoy Wi-Fi access, a plasma television, reading material and great coffee. Children must be supervised during open play hours; parents are asked to sign a waiver upon entering. The waiver can be printed from the Web site, signed, and brought in with the child in the event another adult is supervising.

Edwards and her husband Dan have been in the area for eight years. Prior to becoming a mother to two very active boys, Caden and Jackson, she was a professional in the field of child and family counseling. She has also been a fitness instructor and began the popular "Once Upon a Workout" program. Island Playground is essentially the product of Edwards' experience and expertise.

In addition to the open play hours, kids can enjoy cardio exercise classe, ballet classes and create and play classes. There will also be scheduled drop-off programs, summer camps and parent's night out that will take place in addition to regular play hours.

A number of party packages designed to accommodate different budgets and party sizes are available.

"I've met many moms and families through teaching family fitness programs," said Edwards. "I kept hearing that we needed something more for children to do here. I really hope to fill a need in the area by offering a safe, clean, healthy place for kids to play."

Island Playground is located at 1538 Fording Island Road, Suite 104 – right behind Jalapeños restaurant, across from Moss Creek Village.

Open play hours are: Monday through Thursdays, from 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Fridays, from 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.; and Saturdays, from 10 a.m. – 2p.m. (except when a private party is booked) – with extended hours in the event that no parties have been booked.

Reach Island Playground by calling (843) 837-8383, or visiting island-playground.com. M