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## RAK Buzz

### THINGS TO DO

## Something new to keep kids active

**Text and photo by Brooke Mortensen**  
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Laughter, hand clapping and the pitter-patter of little feet echo throughout the room as enthusiastic kids, parents and coaches round up the bunch to start the "Welcome Song" with Buddy the mascot.

A whole new day from any previous they have experienced is about to begin at **Great Play**, a new gym in Chandler.

Owners Rich Iwanski and Barbara Deppisch who both have backgrounds in education, opened the gym April 6.

"We were looking to open up a children-related business that was also related to the health field and we found Jyl and Keith Camhi with Great Play," Iwanski says. "There are so many things competing for kids' attention like computer games and we just wanted to bring something to the community to keep kids active."



Great Play started in 2006 when the Camhis decided that families were ready for an updated gym with a high-energy, ever-changing, fun-filled curriculum. Much of this came from Jyl's background in management and marketing at Microsoft, Keith's experience in the fitness industry and challenges they faced when their son was diagnosed with fine- and gross-motor deficits.

Each Great Play location includes a variety of classes for ages ranging from 6 months to 12 years old with specific activities to help children develop and further themselves in sports and physical fitness. Classes include Introductory Motor Skills for ages 6 months to 3½ years, Motor Skills and Introductory Athletic Development for ages 3½ to 5½ and Sport Skills and Physical Education for ages 4½ to 12.

Parents can choose whether to put their child in a class with other children, children the same age or a mixed-age class, so that they get the most out of their experience.

"There's a science behind everything," Deppisch says. "The kids are having a blast and don't realize that they're working on skills."

While those in the younger classes climb, swing and enjoy obstacle courses with Buddy, the lovable animated mascot, those in older classes get the chance to learn different

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sport skills and play in games using the S.C.O.R.E (Success Continuously Reinforced and Extended) teaching method, while being rooted on by virtual crowds and their coaches. The S.C.O.R.E method was designed to help kids achieve their highest potential and develop skills while building self-esteem.

"We try to break down the steps like throwing by starting with the ball by their ear and then progressing to how to hold it and how to flick the wrist," Iwanski says. "We start the classes with a high-energy introduction that gives them a lot of self-confidence and keeps everything non-competitive. The only competing is against themselves."

Great Play also offers themed birthday parties, open hours, free trial classes, seasonal sport classes and private lessons.

"I like that they have more than just structured activities and more of the movement and variety. It's nice to have a place to come where the kids can explore, especially in the hot summers," says Cindy Hayes, whose 22-month-old son Joshua Hayes is in one of the classes.

To keep kids active, interested and in a continuing state of fitness and improved ability, equipment is laid out differently each day and an Interactive Arena made up of six computers, eight projectors and a directional sound system is utilized, giving kids a whole new experience.

"It's definitely a transition for them so that they aren't doing the same thing all the time," says Annette Gallegos, manager at Great Play. "We move the equipment around every five to seven minutes so that they get to use all the equipment that we have."

Coaches at Great Play attend training in Stamford, Conn., before they begin so that they are fully prepared and able to teach and help children in the classes. They also all have backgrounds in working with children.

"I think this is where they really understand children and know the abilities of the age group in the classes," says Sandra Sturgeon, grandparent of 2-year-old twins Miranda and Jackson. "The coaches are great. They do nothing but encourage."

Coaches learn how to use all of the equipment and how to move it around and then progress to learning how to assist as coaches and how to lead a class.

"The training definitely helped a ton because without it we would have been clueless," Gallegos says.

Great Play is a place for kids to meet take part in activities with kids their own age, but it's also a place for parents meet one another.

"I got the email about Great Play opening up from a mom group, so we came and had a blast," says Mindy Bargeloh, mother of 2-year-old Mackenzie in the class. "The teachers are all experienced and energetic, so it allows the parents to step back a little."

According to Iwanski and Deppisch some future changes may be made to the structure of Great Play, like adding classes for kids over age 12 and maybe even classes for parents to learn some skills.

"We have heard from some parents that they want to teach their kids sport skills and play with them, but they don't know how to," Iwanski says. "[Jyl and Keith Camhi] are toying around with the idea for parents to learn skills as well."

Classes begin at 9:30 a.m. Monday, Friday and Saturday and 9 a.m. Tuesday through Thursday. Great Play is located at 2855 W. Ray Road in Chandler. **Great Play.**

### More RAK Buzz

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