

Watching them play while you work

**By Forrest Adams, West Fargo Pioneer
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A new preschool in West Fargo allows parents to watch their children play in the school while they themselves work in the office.

Packer Playland Childcare and Preschool, Inc. opened its doors Oct. 1, and owner Sheila Strauser said the idea to mount overhead cameras above the six partitioned classrooms and then to broadcast live images of the children at play in the rooms onto a private web site came from a parent. She said no sound is broadcast over the web site, but for parents, reading the children's body language is enough.

The technology has won Strauser's young organization praise.

"I have gotten a lot of positive feedback about this," she said. "A lot of parents feel guilty when they go to work and leave their children at daycare, but they can access our web site during the day on the computer, wherever they may be. Then with the private pass code I give them, they can get into the private classroom and watch their child to see they are having fun and playing with other kids. It's good for parents to be able to see this."

Working mother Holley Jemtrud of West Fargo has two children in the daycare, a 5-month-old daughter and 4-year-old son. She described how happy she is to be able to peek in on her children during the day.

"For me it's a comfort zone. I can look in at any time during the day. The nursery has nothing to hide," she said.

There are four teachers, including Strauser, at Packer Playland, with more to be added as student enrollment increases, she said. The facility is licensed to take care of infants and kids up to 12 years old.

After working in daycares for the past 12 years, five of them in West Fargo out of her home and for the previous years in Dickinson, Strauser said she finally listened to encouragement from parents whose children she cared for about one year ago and decided to "spread the love" by expanding her nursery operation.

For the next eight months, she investigated and learned about small business, insurance, real estate, leases and more, waiting for the right building to open and knowing all the while: "If it is meant to be, it will be."

Describing her job as "giving kids tools and encouragement and then watching them grow into young ladies and gentlemen," Strauser said she enjoys watching the children learn.

"Oh, and it's very fulfilling when after they have graduated from preschool in the spring, they come back from kindergarten or first grade to visit me."

Strauser said that in addition to holding a spring graduation for kids leaving the school, she plans for the Packer Playland children to give a holiday performance in the school.

Hours of operation are from 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday with preschool for 2 and 3-year-olds beginning at 9 a.m. Playland staff also transports kids to school in Strauser's Packer Playland SUV during the morning.

Packer Playland is located at 430 Sheyenne Street. For more information, call 281-4790.

www.packerplayland.com