

B U S I N E S S

Bellevue mother trying to keep family time 'Simply Fun'

The local company is making big strides in a fun-filled field

By JESSICA DAVIS

A Bellevue entrepreneur and mother of two, Gail DeGiulio fondly remembers playing "Twister" with her family as a child.

It is from memories such as this that DeGiulio, a former executive at Wizards of the Coast, Classmates.com and Microsoft Corp., was inspired to start her own company, Simply Fun. The company encourages families to spend time together by playing party games.

"I was disappointed with the lack of variety and innovation of traditional games to play with my family and friends," she said. "I couldn't seem to find a great selection of games that were easy to learn and fun to play. When I did purchase a game, either the rules were difficult to understand or the game itself took hours to finish."

After attending a scrapbooking party where guests were shown how to create their own scrapbooks, DeGiulio began to think about home parties as a way to sell games.

"The new games we enjoyed most were discovered at someone's party, at a family gathering or through a recommendation of a friend," said DeGiulio.

About the same time, she met Matt Molen and Jeremy Young, who had started a company that translated European games into English. She invited Molen and Young, who are both parents of young children, to join her new venture.

"When she brought us this idea, we said, 'Bingo.' There was no hesitation," said Molen.

Young now is vice president of product development and Molen is vice president of marketing. All of the partners received an enthusiastic response when they began hosting parties with game prototypes.

"Our mission is to promote the importance of play," said DeGiulio. "Play does so many things, not only for social interaction, but also happiness."

Employees at SimplyFun practice what they preach by

taking a break each week to play the games with each other.

"Everyone here has to stop what they're doing, no matter what," said DeGiulio. "We're about play."

All of the SimplyFun games and play products are designed to be learned in five minutes or less and be played in less than 30 minutes by children and adults alike. Each game also comes with a video that demonstrates how it is played.

"The games are so simple, that anyone can learn them," said DeGiulio.

Products vary from "Linkity," a word-association card game; "Tunebaya," a sing-along game; and "Spy," a board game that tests players' skills in espionage. Some involve luck and others involve strategy. SimplyFun's products are particularly popular with families who home-school, noted DeGiulio.

"Kids don't have any idea at all that they're learning," she said.

SimplyFun officially began recruiting sales consultants in late 2004 and launched with just five products. Now, there are more than 20. The products are invented by game designers from all around the world, including two in Bellevue.

The privately owned company sells games through direct sales by consultants who host in-home parties. The games sell for between \$9.50 and \$40. The puzzles cost between \$7 and \$26, plus tax and delivery charges.

"It's great because you get a chance to try before you buy," said DeGiulio.

SimplyFun consultants, ranging in age from 25 to 70, number in the hundreds and are represented in 35 states. For \$149 plus tax, consultants are given a kit with games, puzzles and training material. They also receive their own Web site, where customers can place orders.

Consultants earn 25-percent commissions on the products they sell. A portion of all product sales is also distributed to children's health and education organizations and family-advocacy and service programs across the United States. The Boys and Girls Club is one such beneficiary.

• For information about SimplyFun, visit www.simplyfun.com.

Jessica Davis is a contributing writer.



Katherine Ganter / Bellevue Reporter
Simply Fun CEO Gail DeGiulio plays the game "Handy" with other members of the Simply Fun team on Sept. 14.