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Moms unite on the Web

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KRISTI ALBERTSON/Daily Inter Lake |

When a friend told Niki MacLean she wanted to start a social network for parents, MacLean wondered why a mom-specific site was necessary.

If the goal was to give parents in Carbondale, Colo., where MacLean lived at the time, a place to connect, why not create a Facebook page or a Yahoo group, she wondered. A separate site would require a separate log-in name and password, which MacLean thought would be a hassle.

But she was soon won over by a site geared toward her interests as a parent. She didn't have to sift through e-mails and information that didn't interest her as she might on another site or group, and "the interface is a lot more beautiful" than those of other sites, she said.

MacLean was such a fan that when she and her husband decided to move to his hometown of Whitefish in July, she was excited about starting a similar site — www.whitefishmomsformoms.com — in her new community.

Whitefish Moms for Moms provides a forum for sharing ideas, advice and encouragement with other parents. There are forums about cloth diapers, pediatrician recommendations and how to store children's artwork. Mothers can find like-minded friends in groups geared toward yoga and the outdoors or find support from other mothers of infants, multiples or teenagers.

Except for differences in color, the site looks like the original Carbondale Moms for Moms Web page. Similar sites have started in Colorado in Aspen, Basalt and Glenwood Springs, as well as in Bend, Ore.

The Whitefish site has been up and running since November and earlier this week had 123 members.

"It's just been great. The response has been really good," MacLean said.

That response might come as a shock to some. MacLean's husband, David, had doubts about whether the site would work in the Flathead. People already were well-connected and didn't need a website to find other parents, he thought.

"When I ran it by him, he said everybody who lives in Whitefish is from Whitefish," MacLean said.

But MacLean kept meeting people who, like herself, had recently moved to the area and were looking for ways to connect with others in the community.

"Two weeks later, I told him, 'I think things have changed,'" she said.

Despite the site's name, Moms for Moms is open to fathers as well, MacLean said.

"We only have one dad member. He's been the only one brave enough to join," she said, laughing.

But not all the women who belong are mothers raising their own children, MacLean said. Some grandmothers have joined after, for one reason or another, they have ended up raising their grandchildren.

"They are looking for a way to get connected and find out about all sorts of stuff going on," MacLean said. "It's difficult for them to connect; they've been out of it for 20 years or whatever."

The site also is a place for mom- and dad-owned businesses to connect with potential customers. The Moms Business Consortium features

Moms for Moms members who run businesses — “anything from the smallest business up to the ones that are larger that are run by a mom,” MacLean said.

Those members pay a minimal fee to advertise on the site, which is where MacLean, as site moderator, makes a little money. It isn’t even close to enough for a full-time job; MacLean also is a youth minister at St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church and a Spanish teacher at Flathead Valley Community College.

“Eventually it is meant to be sort of self-supporting,” she said of the site. “It will generate enough money to cover the fees that I have to pay for owning the site, the technology stuff that goes with it and to cover my time.

“It’s not the most lucrative project, but it’s lucrative in other ways — emotionally,” she added. “It’s a great way for me to connect personally.”

MacLean, who has a 5-year-old son, a 3-year-old daughter and a baby on the way, said Moms for Moms has helped her meet more people than she might otherwise have met in the short time she has lived in Whitefish.

“Since July I’ve met all sorts of moms I wouldn’t have, just through the site. I’m hoping to do it for other people, too,” she said.

That’s part of the appeal of Moms for Moms, she said. Membership is limited to parents who live in Whitefish or Columbia Falls, so the site is merely an online extension of an actual, physical community. Eventually, she would like to start a site for Kalispell parents.

“These are people who live in your community who you could actually hook up with,” MacLean said. “It’s nice ’cause it’s local.”

On the Net:

www.whitefishmomsformoms.com

Reporter Kristi Albertson may be reached at 758-4438 or at kalbertson@dailyinterlake.com.

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