

## HOME GROWN BUSINESS PROFILE

# Happy Bambino

*Happy Bambino is not just another baby-products store. Its owners take a holistic approach to parenting and natural baby care, and offer everything from toys and diapers to classes.*

by TRICIA REED

Tucked into a small shop front on Atwood Avenue is a big comfort to new parents, the Happy Bambino pregnancy and early parenting center.

Upon entering the center I am immediately met by the comforting chaos of happy children and parents milling around the store, meeting room, and resource center. The busy store is flooded with sunlight from the front and back windows and I see cozy easy chairs situated throughout the store for weary parents to enjoy a rest or nurse a hungry baby. As I venture further into the shop I am cheerfully greeted by one of the owners, Alison Dodge. Although she has never met me in person she greets me by name and exudes a natural welcoming vibe.

Alison and her business partner Lea Wolf opened Happy Bambino in November of 2004. Both women had discovered a passion for holistic parenting as new moms and saw a need for a single place in Madison that new parents could go to find resources and support. Independently the women began researching what it would take to create this much-needed resource. Then fate stepped in when a mutual friend introduced them after hearing their similar plans.

"When I told a friend about my business idea she was like, 'No Way! I know someone who wants to do exactly that same business idea, I can't believe you've never met her! Can I pass your name along to her?' And the rest was history," explains Lea.

Once the pair met a natural dialog began and it was soon made clear that a partnership was in their future. Both women brought to the table a great deal of education, Lea's in education and Alison's in human resources. Although this didn't necessarily prepare them for retail it did help them create an extremely solid business plan based on extensive research and survey-

ing.

"When we went to the bank they didn't understand how viable this business was [the way we had it planned]...they said we needed to be on the west side. It was in fact a blessing that the people we had to sell this idea to were not familiar with our business concept because having to prove it to them really strengthened our business plan."

Once funding was secured it was decided to jump in feet first from the start and make Happy Bambino everything they knew it could be. That included a store that provided the natural parenting products they as mothers had searched for, a resource center for parents to find information on holistic parenting, and a meeting space that could be made available to parent groups and be used by the business itself to offer both fee based and free parenting classes and support groups.

The store is the perfect outlet for those hard to find natural parenting tools. Happy Bambino offers a variety of cloth diapers and supplies, natural bath and body products, natural educational toys, and shower gifts. They also have specially selected pregnancy, birth and parenting books that emphasize empowerment and children's books that feature a variety of family models and lifestyles. In addition new parents will find a wide range of baby clothing from all natural cotton and wool garments to gently used items from the Eco-Boutique resale section where parent's can exchange their gently used baby and maternity clothes for store credit.

Another popular feature of the store is their huge selection of baby carriers. Happy Bambino carries the areas largest selection of baby slings, wraps, pouches, packs, and more for the busy parent. They also provide free classes to help you choose and use your carrier. No time for a class? Happy Bambino prides itself on providing knowledgeable and helpful personalized assistance to their customers for all their products.

Happy Bambino also takes pride in their support of breastfeeding. The store offers a large selection of breastfeeding supplies as well as nursing bras and breastfeeding sup-

port materials. While the parenting center offers free breastfeeding clinics, classes, and support groups led by certified lactation counselors.

In fact Happy Bambino offers a large list of free and fee based classes, groups, and workshops. The new parent or parent-to-be will find a vast array of activities and educational experiences to choose from. Options like Cloth Diapering 101, Mom & Baby Yoga, Da Vinci's Playhouse Workshop, At-Home Dads Playgroup, Parent Book Clubs, Healthy Children, Health Planet Discussion groups, and so much more! You can find the Happy Bambino activity schedule online at [www.happybambino.com](http://www.happybambino.com). Just click classes.

Access to resources does not end with classes and products at Happy Bambino. Their front entryway acts as a resource center for guests providing a large selection of pamphlets, flyers, and other materials for parents to peruse at their leisure. The resource center is chalk full of information on holistic parenting support businesses, preschools, child care, breastfeeding, and more.

Most of all Happy Bambino is about creating community for parents and families. Their goal is to provide a place people can come for support, advice, products, and friendship.

"I think a lot of people have an idea of what parenting is going to



Photo by Tricia Reed

Happy Bambino co-owners Lea Wolf (left) and Alison Dodge

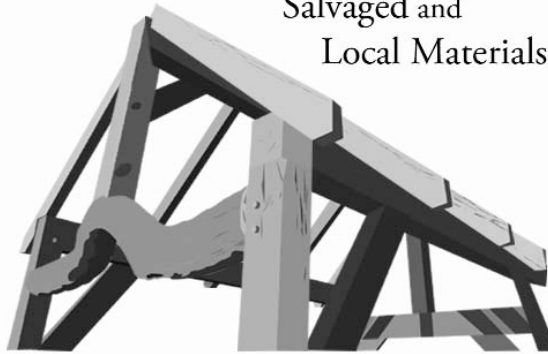
be like and then they are surprised by the reality of it. It can be very isolating. It's a difficult family transition. Our country tends towards pushing isolation and nuclear family, not community interaction and activities. We are trying, at Happy Bambino, to make a place for community interaction for people so they can avoid the isolation of parenting."

Happy Bambino is located at 2045 Atwood Avenue on Madison's east side. For more information or to access their class and activities schedule contact them at (608) 204-6147 or visit them on the web at [www.happybambino.com](http://www.happybambino.com). Store hours are Sunday noon - 4pm, Mondays, Wednesday, Fridays and Saturdays, 10am - 5pm, and Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10am - 7pm.

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