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Children learn to mind their manners at PoliteChild

by Deborah Stone

Features Writer

Woodinville resident Corinne Gregory was raised knowing how to behave and with an understanding of what constitutes good manners. As a mother of three young children, she began passing this knowledge on to her kids at a very early age by using herself as a role model. "I knew that the earlier I started modeling and reinforcing the principles of proper behavior, the more instinctive it would be in my children," explains Gregory. "It's never too early to begin to teach children the fundamentals of good behavior." In the process of raising her kids, Gregory began to really take notice of, what she labels, "an erosion of human values" within society. She says, "I see how our civilization is less than civilized and it really bothers me, but rather than simply sitting around commiserating with others about how bad things are, I decided to take action."

A year ago, Gregory developed The PoliteChild, a program that seeks to make a difference in the lives of the children and families it touches by providing young children with a solid foundation for learning and using good manners and proper basic etiquette. The program is based on four guiding principles: thinking "beyond oneself" is the foundation for how people speak and act when interacting with others; developing and exhibiting kindness and consideration toward others will contribute towards creating a more satisfying and successful life for a child as he/she enters adulthood; civility of behavior needs to be taught, practiced and reinforced by example in all aspects of a child's everyday world and finally, recognizing the need for society to return to a more "civilized period of behavior."

"I created this program because of the need I saw, but also because I realized that it could have a definite, positive impact on future generations," comments Gregory. The PoliteChild has a complete set of course offerings covering a range of topics including such areas as table manners and dining skills, party behavior, meeting and greeting introductions, phone manners, how to treat others with respect and how to handle disagreements and deal with rudeness. The Basic Course is an eight-session introductory program available for three age groups: 2 1/2-6, 6-11 and 12-15, followed by several advanced courses focused on expanding and developing new skills for use in various specialty situations.

A mix of instructional techniques and materials are used during the classes to make learning fun. There is role playing, scenario building, games, videos and handouts, as well as a variety of interactive study tools. Parents receive a guidebook that focuses on the themes of each class and provides information to help them reinforce the learning at home. Children receive reward charts to keep track of the skills they practice at home from week to week.

"We really want to make sure that the kids have lots of opportunity to practice what they've learned," says Gregory. "It's not enough just to teach the rules of proper behavior. They need to be put into action." At the end of each course, there's a graduation tea for the children and their families.

Although The PoliteChild has only been in business for a year, Gregory is pleased with its success. She says, "It's going better than I had expected and it's beginning to take off now. Our classes for preschoolers are the most popular, but in June, we're going to be doing classes for grade school children through Evergreen Academy. I'm also in conversation with two major churches that operate education programs and they have expressed an interest in our program."

Most parents who find out about The PoliteChild do so through word of mouth, according to Gregory. She's also done several presentations entitled, "Raising a Mannerly Child in an Unruly World," for community groups, which helps market the program, as well as convey its philosophy. "The response to the program has been overwhelmingly positive," comments Gregory. "Parents tell me that they really

notice differences in their children, especially in their abilities to think beyond themselves and take others' perceptions into count. They tell me that their kids volunteer to help in the family and that they're kinder to their siblings. To hear these observations is so rewarding to me."

Gregory teaches many of the classes, but she does have a few other teachers whom she has trained to provide instruction. Her desire is to hopefully expand the program, but she doesn't want to grow too fast. She says, "It's important to me that we maintain a very high level of quality and I am constantly accessing feedback every step of the way to insure this continues. Someday, I'd like to see The PoliteChild expand to other states and be used around the country, but for right now, it's in the building up stages and we're going to move slowly."

For more information about The PoliteChild, call (425) 844-9711 or access the company's web site at: www.politechild.com.

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