

February 2007

Entrepreneur®

Kidding Around

These entrepreneurs are serious about their kid-friendly franchises.

By Tracy Stapp
Entrepreneur Magazine
February 2007
<http://www.entrepreneur.com/>



Ann Gray Graf
founder/CEO

With the under-18 crowd making up over a quarter of the U.S. population, catering to kids can really pay off. But it's a crowded market, so standing out can be tough. New franchisors are finding unique ways to target the children's market--and attracting parents by teaching kids important skills and values.

Garage Band

When Ann Gray Graf was young, the only acting opportunity for children was in musicals--and she couldn't sing. As an adult, she drew upon her experiences as a comedian and actress to start **the actor's garage** in Manhasset, New York, in 2004. Her classes teach TV and film acting to kids in a noncompetitive environment. Word spread quickly, leading Graf to start more classes in the Northeast; she began franchising in 2006 and also added stand-up and improv classes to her offerings. Students perform for an agent during their last class, and some have even landed roles in films, but the classes aren't just for aspiring actors. Kids learn confidence, interviewing skills and teamwork. "As adults, that's what our lives are all about," says Graf, 49, "and nobody really teaches us those things."

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