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The Mamapreneur Movement

By Linda Morgan

The motherhood bar

These days, "more time with the kids" no longer means reading them a sweet Shel Silverstein verse before letting them loose on the backyard play set. Let's face it: Gen X has taken motherhood to a whole new level.

Today's moms — pumping breast milk in the office, preparing organic baby food from scratch and standing in predawn lines to get their newborns on preschool waitlists — often hold themselves to Herculean standards.

"There are enormous amounts of 'should' on mothers," says life coach Margie Warrell, author of *Find Your Courage*. "You should have them in art class; you should expose them to another language; they should swim by 4 and read by 5."

Which is, of course, one more reason women like Allison Nelson look to replace linear career tracks with more pliable, more autonomous alternatives.

Nelson, after earning an M.B.A. from Harvard, worked as a management consultant and technology executive in San Francisco. Then her first child, Sam, was born.

"I decided I couldn't do it anymore; I felt like I wasn't being a good mom," she says. "Something needed to give."

Nelson, along with a former classmate, launched *Bookmarks*, a bimonthly magazine that ranks and reviews books. The magazine took off.

After a move to Seattle with her husband and two children, Nelson, along with yet another Harvard Business School grad, decided to

continued on page 40

Mamapreneurs

continued from page 39

embark upon her next venture. The Local Vine, a Seattle wine bar, opened last month.

"Having your own business doesn't solve things when it comes to the number of hours you spend on it. But it helps with flexibility," says Nelson, who is now single. "I can decide where my meetings are. I can cancel a meeting. I can work at night from home after my kids go to sleep. And I can take them to school."

That so many of these mamapreneurs have devised ways to combine their new enterprises with family life is an extraordinary testament to technology. "This is the time in history where it's possible for women to have children and work from home," says Mischelle Davis. "There are online tools such as community message boards, shopping card services, teleconferencing and more. You can start your business from a laptop in your kitchen."

Bellevue resident Elizabeth

Fukutomi began Dizzy's Tumblebus five years ago, after finding that her job as a consultant "wasn't good for my family." Although she now uses an outside office, she began the business in her dining room. "If it weren't for the Internet and email, it wouldn't be close to the same," she says. "I can draft 10 emails after the kids are in bed."

Flexibility. Balance. Wine bars, Web sites, Tumblebuses and bamboo baby blankets. We're witnessing a re-invention of what defines a "working mother." And Sally Narodick, trailblazer and entrepreneur extraordinaire, welcomes that new paradigm. "I don't see these young women reeling against the system," notes Narodick. "They are looking for a meaningful use of their intellect that will give them other things as well. They seem happier. I think it's maybe a better place to be." ■

Linda Morgan is ParentMap's associate editor.