

NEIGHBORS

THURSDAY, JULY 14, 2005 | EDITOR: ANA ACLE-MENENDEZ | 305-671-4328 | www.herald.com

WK02 **The Miami Herald**



SUMMER LESSONS

West Kendall's 'Little Swimmers' program, formed by two Miami-Dade firefighters, teaches little ones like Alec Hoyo, 5, to enjoy the pool safely. **PAGE 3**

MARIMER CODINA / FOR THE HERALD

MIAMI-DADE

Michael's arts and crafts store has stencils which can provide a unique look for your home at an affordable price, **4**

WEST KENDALL

Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos Alvarez tells a homeowner association about his plans to change county government, **6**

WEST KENDALL

Small caterer expands countywide, **6**
CLASSIFIED AND TROPICAL LIFE INSIDE



PHOTOS BY MARIMER CODINA/FOR THE HERALD

EVERYBODY IN THE POOL: Alec Hoyo, 5, dives in, above, as instructors Meric Tendrich, left, and Gerald Little and Victoria Sardinas, 5, watch. Below, Chloe Tenn, 5, practices with help from instructor Tony Rodriguez.

STAYING ABOVE WATER

LITTLE SWIMMERS, WHICH TEACHES CHILDREN AS YOUNG AS 8 MONTHS HOW TO SWIM, BEGAN IN WEST KENDALL ABOUT 12 YEARS AGO TO PREVENT SUMMER DROWNINGS

BY ANI MARTINEZ
armartinez@herald.com

Children armed with floaties splash in the water. Parents attentively watch who is jumping into the pool. The sun blasts their eyes as the children come up for air.

These are the sights of summer. But every year water safety becomes a concern.

"Drownings occur every single summer," said Adriana Castro, chief of pediatrics at Baptist Hospital. "You are never completely out of danger. Just last week a professional swimmer, 17, drowned because of a leg cramp."

Kids should take swimming lessons when they are as young as six months, Castro recommended, to prepare them for South Florida's favorite pastime. Although an advocate of consecutive swimming lessons, she urged parents to remember: "Lessons don't make kids drown-proof" and advised parental supervision as well.

Hoping to decrease the drowning incidents, two best friends and former physical education teachers, Gerald Little and Meric Tendrich, opened Little Swimmers in

West Kendall about 12 years ago and opened a Kendall location in 2002.

Their goal: "When children leave this facility we want them to defend themselves and know what to do," Little said.

When they are not showing kids how to kick, hold their breath or get to the wall — the cardinal rule of beginner lessons — the two work as firefighters. Even then, they sometimes find themselves involved with drowning victims.

"Unfortunately we see it happen all the time," Tendrich said. "It is a senseless death."

The certified water safety instructors incorporate fun activities with essential knowledge.

Sophia Morin, 4, of West Kendall, learned how to swim, jump and get to the pool's edge, but Morin is most proud of the fun she has in swimming class.

"I have a special trick where I can get in the water, and I can twist and turn," she said. "I do it all by myself."

When the kids are not at the classes, they practice their new skills at home.



LITTLE SWIMMERS

- **Address:** Two locations: 6401 Kendale Lakes Dr.; 9950 SW 104th St.
- **Telephone:** 305-383-SWIM in West Kendall and 305-598-1200 in Kendall.
- **Website:** www.littleswimmers.net

"If we start training them early, they will be swimming like fishes by the time they are older," Little said.

Georgette Hoyo, a homeowner from the Falls area, is appreciative of Little Swimmers because she knows the role she must play as a parent for her 5-year-old son, Alec.

"In the last class, they tell you to come in the pool and show you the methods to use at home," Hoyo said. "Practice, practice, practice."

Hoyo enrolled her 1-year-old son for next year's session, a Mommy and Me class, in which the parent gets in the water with the child. This two-week course is \$110 for children ages 8 months to 2 years.

Lourdes Sardinas drives a long way to get her daughters, Sophia, 7, and Victoria, 5, to the classes.



"I live on Flagler and 87th Avenue, but it is worth the trip because I have noticed so much improvement when they are in the pool," she said.

The Sardinas girls are summer regulars at Little Swimmers. This is typical for the young kids, Little explained. "Even though they know how to swim, parents bring them back," he said. "Your kid is your investment."

Parents enroll their kids in either private or group lessons. The five-day private lessons are \$125 for children ages 8 months or older. In the two-week group lessons, children ages 4 and older are divided into similar ages and skills for \$110.

"It is a great feeling for us when customers come back," Tendrich said. "When they do a good job, it is a reflection on what we do."

Swimming lessons are not only for the kids who need to learn the basics or for safety. "Every child is different, so every lesson is different," Little said.

Tendrich and Little also teach children with special needs including disabilities, such as Down's syndrome or cerebral palsy. "We started doing it because we wanted to give something back," Tendrich said. "We are taking a child that's so afraid of the water and, eventually, they learn to love it."