

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### The New kidZ in Town

*Local teacher and business entrepreneur creates a smoke-free, drug-free, alcohol-free, bully & label-free Friday/Saturday night hangout for kids*

**TOWN & COUNTRY, FL**—A brand new concept is coming to Town & Country and it is big, though the location itself doesn't claim to be. Whitzend kidZone is a cozy 800 sq. ft. location that focuses solely on ages 10-16, a demographic too old for Chucky Cheese and too young for a night club. As you enter the lighted alcove just past Nanny Jeans Children's and Maternity Consignment shop, you can't help but notice the handwritten white and blue words filling Whitzend's two glass windows: *coexist* and *be the change you want to see in the world*. Enter the building and you are surrounded by bright white walls lined with current movie posters and colorful framed positive affirmations hung in a crooked fashion. A Twister board is painted on the floor. Immediately, you sense there is something special about this place.

Whitzend Entrepreneur Deb Kelley explains, "I wanted to put the end quote from *The Breakfast Club* on the window, but my daughter sort of rolled her eyes, so we went for *be the change*." She laughs and adds, "My vision is defined on our website. I want kids to know there are no labels allowed in here. Bullying will get you banned. Each night we will do an ice breaker. This is a safe place to hang-out with friends and new friends you just haven't met yet. We have white walls because we encourage kids to leave their individual mark."

As a computer design teacher at Lee Gifted for the last two years, Kelley was inspired to open Whitzend after listening to her kids complain about having nothing to do but the mall and movies at night. When the opportunity arose to actually do something, she did. "My mom moved Nanny Jeans from one small location to one triple the size. She had extra space in her new place she used for storage, but once consolidated, gave me an empty space to bring my concept to fruition. In my life and my other business, The WriteOne Creative Services, I am an advocate of volunteerism and Pay It Forward and this gave me the perfect opportunity."

Though the room stayed empty through months of planning, Kelley reached out online and was pleasantly surprised by the reception. "Friends, family and parents of students, together with the Craigslist, Facebook and Freecycle community, have been unbelievably generous. We have over a dozen Angel Sponsors on our website. Without them, this would still be an empty room."

Whitzend kidZone is a self-described Friday and Saturday night, old-fashioned *living room-like* hangout; a tree clubhouse without the tree. It has a comfy seating area for board games, video gaming and kid-friendly cable TV, a wifi internet area with the ability for kids to bring their laptops, a game area for foosball, arcade basketball, electronic darts, an 8 foot pool table which can be flipped to become an air hockey table, a music area with keyboard and acoustic guitar, and a monstrous oversized bean bag chair that petite kids will have to get help getting on to and enough surround sound to shake the walls.

Though naysayers may argue that kids can do the same things at home, Kelley is quick to rebuff: "Not all kids have everything we have. Most parents would not leave their kids home alone with a group of friends at night if they want to go out themselves for, say, dinner and a movie. I know, personally, if my child has a friend over, I am responsible for that child and wouldn't even think of making plans out of the house. Additionally, kids would not have the opportunity to interact with and meet other new kids if they just stayed at home, and this gives the parents four hours of down-time and a chance at Date Night, knowing their kids are safe."

August 27th and 28th kicks off the 7pm grand opening followed by every Friday and Saturday night from 7pm-11pm. Registration is strictly online, limited to 24 kids, costs only \$20 and registration closes at 5pm the night of attendance. Friday is for ages 10-13 and Saturday, 13-16.

As part of the registration fee, Whitzend will offer classes in graphic design, green screen digital photography, yoga, fun food art, and other creative arts instruction. In addition, Whitzend showcases preteen and teen DJs, singers and bands with their information on dedicated page on the Whitzend website. Thirteen year old DJ ZJA will be part of Saturday's opening night as Whitzend's first guest DJ. The next special event is WhitzendIdol'sGotTalent with auditions on September 10 and the talent competition two Fridays later.

In its earliest stages, Kelley contacted vending arcade companies throughout Tampa Bay to provide a coin-operated Dance Dance Revolution machine for Whitzend and was shocked to encounter negativity. "I was basically told the companies had no interest because we are too small and they wouldn't make money. I was willing give them 100% of the profits. One company manager even had the gall to say my business was a bad idea and doomed to fail." Such words of discouragement only made Kelley strive to work harder. She punctuates her final sentence with a triumphant smile. "We replaced one coin arcade game with the Wii and Xbox 360, Guitar Hero, DJ Hero. Foosball. Basketball. Music. Air hockey. A pool table...Yeah, I think we're good now." ###

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