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IF YOU GO

- **WHAT:** Taster's Show-case, Kidango's annual food-and-wine festival
- **WHEN:** 1 to 4 p.m. April 19
- **WHERE:** Marriott, 46100 Landing Parkway, Fremont
- **COST:** \$35 in advance, \$45 at the door
- **INFO:** Call 510-897-6912 or go to www.tastersshowcase.org

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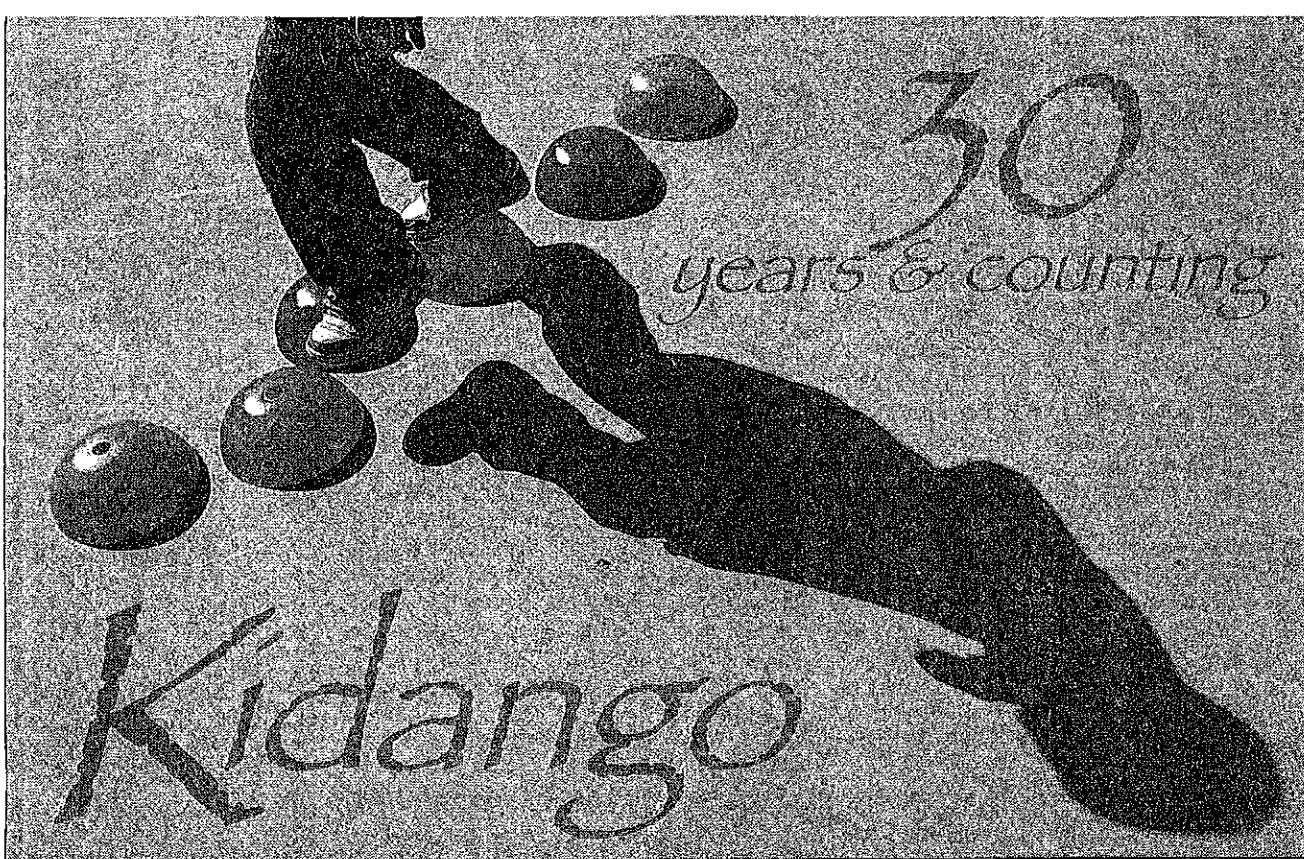
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By Ben A
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A CHILD, top, makes his way across balancing domes during playtime at Kidango's original Fremont site. A group of toddlers file to class, right. A toddler hugs a Barney doll, above.

ANDA CHU/STAFF PHOTOS



Early childhood care program to hold fundraiser April 19

By Linh Tat
STAFF WRITER
FREMONT

EIGHT preschoolers bent over a box of colored puff rice, using their hands and cups to dig around for lettered blocks hidden inside. One girl collected the blocks for the group while two youngsters helped fill each other's containers with the rice.

Sure, it was only playtime at the Kidango site on Isle Royal Street in Fremont. But by working in teams and feeling around for the blocks, the activity gave the classmates an opportunity to develop their social

and sensory skills. The activity also turned into a color recognition game, with the teacher asking the students to identify the various hues of the puff rice.

Across campus, a younger group of children up to age 3 was seated in a circle, singing songs. Like the preschool, the day care program was structured with activities to aid in the children's cognitive and social development.

"Our main focus is on the quality of care, not just baby-sitting. The misconception is we're just baby-sitting. But through interactions, through play, ... every activity

See KIDANGO, Page 4



Kidango

FROM PAGE 3

we have, there's a purpose for it," said Sandy Silva, one of three Kidango directors in Fremont.

It's that quality of care that has kept Kidango thriving for three decades.

Launched in 1979 under the name Tri-Cities Children's Centers, the early childhood care and education program started out serving just 90 kids at one Fremont site. Over time, it began providing mental health and early intervention services as well as home visits, and, in 2003, changed its name to Kidango.

Today, the nonprofit organization serves 3,300 children out of 60 sites in Alameda, Santa Clara and San Francisco counties, with plans to expand in Hayward, San Jose and Livermore. The program is staffed at a lower adult-to-child ratio than other programs, Kidango workers said.

The children receive free medical, dental and vision screenings, as well as breakfast, lunch and a snack each day at no extra cost. Free parenting workshops are offered, including ones designed for teen mothers. One campus in San Jose provides tutoring through an after-school program for

youngsters up to age 12.

Executive Director Paul Miller, who joined Kidango just months after it formed, said it's been exciting to watch the program grow.

"I'm really proud of the quality of services. ... I see shortly a day when we're serving single adults and teenagers, particularly in the area of mental health," he said.

While some families pay for the services provided by Kidango, 91 percent of the children come from low-income households and enroll in the program for free, said Camille Llanes, development and communications manager. For some, the meals they receive at Kidango — which adhere to federal nutrition guidelines — represent their only nutritional intake during the week, Kidango employees say.

"We do find that the children are much more hungry Monday mornings," said Llanes, adding that the program is in such high demand that there's a long waiting list for families to enroll.

Kidango would love to expand its services, but like most nonprofits, the scope of its operation depends on funding. In addition to government subsidies, Kidango relies on grants, money it raises, and contributions from private donors. It welcomes in-kind donations from individuals and busi-

nesses, but what it's most in need of is unrestricted funds — monetary donations with no requirements on how it must be spent, Llanes said.

That's why those who work for Kidango are hoping their largest fundraiser each year will prove to be a hit once again. The annual Taster's Showcase, a food-and-wine festival featuring dishes and spirits from local restaurants, will take place April 19 at the Fremont Marriott. The Taster's Showcase will kick off a series of events planned throughout 2009 to celebrate Kidango's first 30 years. And if those who work for the organization get their way, they'll be back in another 30 years with more to celebrate.

"It's been a lot of fun," Miller said. "A lot of people go to work and don't enjoy their jobs. I've had the luxury not only of having a lot of fun, but enjoying the mission of Kidango."



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