

# Sweet Spot

## LIVING



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*The Mother of  
Springfield Moms*

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## KIM LEISTNER ROOT:

# The Mother of Springfield Moms

By Dan Naumovich



Like many young mothers, Kim Leistner Root was always looking for fun things to do with her two daughters. She would search the internet for ideas, but didn't have much luck finding local resources specifically for parents. (This was back in the early aughts, before Facebook had taken off.) So Kim, a publishing professional by trade, decided that she would create the resource herself. And SpringfieldMoms.org was born.

"The idea took off," Kim said "I spent countless hours out at community events, getting the word out about our free online resource center. Within a few years, we had a very loyal following of area readers."

Celebrating its 14th anniversary this month, the SpringfieldMoms website is a one-stop-shop for finding information on just about anything a parent could possibly need. Facts about food allergies. Tips on the best summer camps. Advice on saving for college. And the site's most popular feature, the What's Happening calendar that lists events, concerts, classes, and shows.

"We've become the trusted resource for moms, dads, grandparents and anyone looking for fun things to do in the greater Springfield area," Kim said. "Our seasonal guides, neighborhood garage sales guide, parks and kids eat free directories are popular, there is truly something for everyone."

What started as a monthly email newsletter to 30 area parents has grown into an online presence that surpasses 318,000 annual views to the website and reaches more than 12,000 weekly via their social media network. Most of the growth has been the result of word-of-mouth referrals, from both moms meeting for coffee, then later, people sharing links in Facebook comments.

As the site's viewership grew, Kim was able to start generating advertising revenue. Early plans to franchise the concept to other communities proved too time consuming, but she has noticed that similar sites have popped up throughout central Illinois that follow the SpringfieldMoms template. She's even had a former Springfield resident ask her advice on starting a site in her new home of Naples, Florida.

Over the years, Kim has operated the site with assistance from other area moms: Lisa Whelpley, Julie Kaiser, Dawn Raycraft, and Lauren Coleman. Lisa now manages the twice-monthly e-updates and keeps the What's Happening Calendar full of valuable information.

Kim's daughters - Amanda and Vanessa, who were the inspiration for creating the site - have also been involved from day-one, passing out brochures and hosting free kids' crafts at area community events. Today, they write guest blogs on relevant topics for teens. The girls also help Kim edit videos, take photos and have strong editorial opinions about what is posted on the site. From their mom, they've learned valuable lessons on running a business.

"They have seen the amount of time, care and dedication it takes to build a brand, and I always explain







why I'm doing things, so they understand the process," Kim said. "They've been with me when people take the time to thank me in person and comment on how much time our resource has saved them."

Kim, who grew up in Leland Grove, recently returned to the Sweet Spot, moving into a house with her family in Fox Meadows this past spring. She now lives just around the corner from her grandfather's home, and she's happy to again be among the old trees, beautiful houses and the friendly neighbors.

She and her husband, Darren Root, are together the parents of four children. Vanessa (14) and Amanda (16) are Kim's daughters from her first marriage, while Morgan (17) and Carson (22) are from Darren's.

Vanessa and Amanda Little are now attending Springfield High School, the third generation of Leisters to do so.

"They love being close to everything," Kim said. "Now that my oldest is driving, they can get to and from school and most all of their activities - ballet classes at Dance Arts Studio, SHS Tennis at Washington Park - within minutes."

Following her own years as an SHS Senator, Kim attended the University of Illinois where she majored in Broadcast Journalism. Post-college, she transitioned from broadcast to publishing, landing management and marketing positions for firms focused on the higher education market. As her professional life took off, she decided that her hometown would be a better setting for the next stage of her life.

"I moved back to Springfield when it was time to start a family," she said. "I was ready to leave the fast-paced and expensive lifestyle up in Chicago to get back to my roots and settle back into a community that allows for a balance of work, family and overall ease of lifestyle."

Outside of work, Kim enjoys reading and traveling. She teaches a barre class at the The Pilates Studio of Springfield, and she

serves as the Board of Directors President for the Springfield Ballet Company. In 2014, she was presented with the ATHENA Award from the Illinois Women in Leadership organization.



As SpringfieldMoms prepares to enter its 15th year, Kim is still heavily invested in its growth and continued success. She's created a valuable resource for Springfield and the surrounding areas, and the site has given her plenty back in return.

"It's spurred lifelong friendships," she said. "People who email ideas and content suggestions start contributing and have then become freelance staff. Our graphics and website team are freelance as well. We're a well-oiled machine of people who care about the community and the success of SpringfieldMoms.org."

**DO YOU KNOW A NEIGHBOR WHO HAS A STORY TO SHARE?**

Nominate your neighbor to be featured in one of our upcoming issues! Families receive a complimentary photography setting and digital copy of the published photo. Contact me at [dnaumovich@bestversionmedia.com](mailto:dnaumovich@bestversionmedia.com).