



May 5, 2002

Azell Murphy Cavaan

Parents Find Online Firm a Lifesaver

The thought of finding a custom-ordered babysitter at the mere click of a mouse may sound like a scene straight out of "The Jetsons," but for an increasing number of desperate parents, the convenience is a reality.

"It's an idea whose time has come," said Genevieve Thiers, president and founder of Sittercity.com, an online babysitting resource.

The idea for Sittercity.com grew out of Thiers' personal experience as a babysitter, a job she often turned to as a source of extra money through her college career.

"Parents were always so happy to have a good babysitter," said Thiers, who graduated with a degree in music. "When I saw how desperate they were for a mature, experienced sitter, I knew there was a niche."

Thiers was fresh out of Boston College and just 23 years old when she began to work full time on her idea to create a Web site that would pair experienced college-aged babysitters with parents who needed to spend an evening without the children.

Unlike the traditional word-of-mouth way of obtaining a babysitter, Sittercity.com allows parents to choose a babysitter based on the sitter's published personal profile.

Parents who sign on to Sittercity.com (for a fee of \$39.99 for three months) can search for a college sitter based on personal preferences such as availability and the potential sitter's access to transportation.

They can even look for a non-smoker or someone who is "OK with pets."

Launched in October, Sittercity.com serves more than 500 parents, primarily in Boston, Somerville, Waltham, Newton, Wellesley, Medford and Framingham.

Katie Slocum, the mother of two young sons and president of a Newton-based parent resource organization called Warmlines, was one of the first to sign on for Sittercity.com.

An Indiana native, Slocum and her husband moved to Newton while she was pregnant with her second child. With family members hundreds of miles away and no friends in sight, quiet evenings alone with her husband became a fantasy without a dependable babysitter.

“I even tried stealing babysitters from friends,” said Slocum. “It got to be really sad.”

Promising starts often ended in disappointment, Slocum said – like the time she and her husband found what they considered to be the “perfect teenaged babysitter.”

“She was good with the kids and dependable – at least for the first few weeks,” Slocum said.

But it wasn't very long before that babysitter found herself a new boyfriend and was too busy to babysit.

“She was barely free to sit for us on weeknights and weekends were entirely out,” said Slocum. “That's when I heard about Sittercity.com.”

Today, Slocum has a reservoir of three regulars who often babysit her kids.

“My boys love them all and I'm very comfortable with the sitters because they're experienced and reliable,” she said.

**

Sitters listen on Sittercity.com, according to Thiers.

The company does not screen sitters or check their personal references. Once Sittercity matches with potential sitters, it's up to you to interview them and check their bona fides.

“Our function is solely to help people find sitters,” said Thiers. “We leave the screening to the parents.”

According to Thiers, Sittercity.com also operates in Rhode Island, Ohio and New York and will soon expand...