

# The NapervilleSun

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By Susan Frick Carlman

## Cyber sitters

The graveyard of unrequited New Year's Eve plans is littered with a combination of unanswered phone calls and outright rejections. From baby sitters.

Now is the time to do something about that, according to services that offer a way to line up baby sitters through the home computer. Parents who act sooner than later, they note, might quickly find themselves with a few hours of independent shopping time on their hands – a handy commodity with the holidays so quickly approaching.

Cyber clearinghouses for baby sitters give parents a way to peruse their baby-sitting options via the Internet, and customize their childcare to their own tastes, preferences and needs.

Becca Keaty, public relations and marketing director for Sittercity.com, says her company lets site visitors shop using 30 different criteria spelled out on its pages, such as the days and hours a sitter is available, whether transportation is needed, language fluency, expertise in CPR, education history – even whether she or he smokes or is allergic to pets.

“Essentially what makes our site so great is that we allow parents to search sitters in the privacy of their own home,” Keaty said.

While it's not the only site of its kind available, Sittercity.com was the first begun in 2001, and has many more potential child-care providers to suggest than the others, Keaty said. Its nationwide database of more than 100,000 child-care providers includes nearly 350 sitters available for consideration by the 200 or so subscribers living in the Naperville area.

Mary Beth Dermody, who lives in Oswego and works in Schaumburg, has a subscription. She considers the \$40 initial sign-up fee and monthly subscription cost of \$5 well worth it, and has been an enthusiastic user of the service since she saw an item about it on the news about a year and a half ago.

“I was like, that's great, because I'm not a planning person, and also I commute a long way to Schaumburg from Oswego every day,” Dermody said.

She has been pleased with the care she and her husband Tom have been able to arrange through the service for their 3 ½-year-old son – who comes with two dogs as a part of the deal.

“A lot of the sitters will be dog-friendly, and you don’t have to worry about the dog having an accident while you’re gone,” Dermody said.

Mostly, though, she likes the way it has lent greater spontaneity to her life. She can stipulate when she needs a sitter, how much she’s willing to pay – and perhaps most valuable, she never has to go begging.

“I don’t have to say, ‘Do you want to sit?’ This person really does. They wouldn’t contact you if they didn’t.” she said.

Dermody also likes the idea that it’s something she can do at midnight or dawn, when it would be out of the question to pick up a phone and go looking for childcare.

“I can basically log online, do it, and by noon I have eight, 10 people saying yes, I’ll do it,” she said.

Sittercity.com requires its sitters to be at least 17 years old and to provide at least two references for potential clients to contact if they like. The site – and others of its kind, such as babysitters.com – leaves the task of screening up to the parents.

“Every family has a different comfort level of how much screening they want to do, so we take ourselves out of that process,” Keaty said, noting that for a modest fee, parents can view background checks through a link on the site.

The site also has an area where subscribers can create and read reviews of specific sitters, which gives parents another level of information about their potential care providers, Keaty said.