

# THE PLAIN DEALER

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## **Web site helps link baby sitters and families**

Good baby sitters are worth the unexpected charges on the phone bill and crumbs on the couch.

Parents hoard the names of reliable sitters like winning lottery tickets, sharing them reluctantly with friends and then only after extracting promises that they will always come first in the sitters' little black books.

Now, a new service in Greater Cleveland might make it easier for parents and sitters to find each other.

Sittercity.com is an online listing of parents and sitters that allows both parties to look for each other by such criteria as availability of times, proximity and age of children.

It was started in Boston last fall by Genevieve Thiers, who put herself through Boston College by baby-sitting.

Whenever she baby-sat, she said, she would get calls the next day from "four or five desperate parents" asking if she could sit for them. If she couldn't, she forwarded the requests to friends. Eventually, she wondered if there wasn't a better way to do it.

So she created Sittercity.com. It has spread to Providence, R.I., and, now, Cleveland.

The site is more than a listing of names and numbers.

Parents write a profile that typically includes their address, phone number, the number and ages of their children, whether they can drive sitters, special qualifications sought – such as CPR capability – and whether they have pets.

Sitters, who must be college students, fill out a similar form, but with age, major and college, and references and times available.

Parents can post jobs for sitters to check or take the initiative and run a search for a Spanish-speaking, CPR-certified, non-smoking, early-childhood-education major who doesn't mind dogs and is available from noon to 5 p.m. Thursdays.

The site also allows parents and sitters to post comments about each other after a job.

There is no charge for sitters to register. Parents pay \$39.95 for the first three months and \$5 per month after that. Parents and sitters negotiate their own rates. Sittercity.com does not screen parents or sitters and does not verify any information in the profiles.

Parents should check sitters' references and conduct interviews with them before hiring them, Thiers said.

The service is very popular in Boston, said Katie Slocum in suburban Newton, who was tired of hunting for sitters for her two sons.

"Asking to borrow a friend's sitter's number is like asking to borrow their husband," she said. "It's unbelievable how difficult it is to find a good baby sitter."

She said she has found several good sitters through Sittercity.com

"I've definitely been spreading the gospel," she said.

To get started in Greater Cleveland, Sittercity.com plastered fliers on students' cars and on bulletin boards at area colleges and universities.

More than 200 potential sitters have registered on the site, including students from Kent State University, the University of Akron, Case Western Reserve University and Cleveland State University.

Kristin DePretis, a 20-year-old junior at John Carroll University, already baby-sits for several families, but signed up on Sittercity.com in hopes of finding more work.

"If it does, that'll be good, If not, well..." she said.

Sharese McKinney, a freshman psychology major at Cleveland State, said baby-sitting at \$10 to \$15 an hour would be more lucrative than working fast food or retail.

"The jobs we're getting as college students don't pay enough to live on," she said.