

# Chestnut Hill Local

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## The Little Treehouse is all grown up in new quarters

by Charline Barger

Like many Chestnut Hill parents, I had been to The Little Treehouse play café on Germantown Avenue several times. I knew there was some controversy surrounding building plans, but my kids loved playing there, and I was happy to have the chance to chat with other parents.

To be honest, I didn't know what all the fuss was about; I thought the space was great the way it was and didn't need to be any bigger. So, I was a little apprehensive about The Little Treehouse moving to its new, much larger location, but I was immediately intrigued when I saw the beautiful, old stone building (I later learned it had been a post office years before).

And I was in awe at the enormous play space with towering ceilings and light pouring in from cathedral-like windows. My daughter pointed at colorful tribal-like paintings lining the walls and gazed up at huge foam flowers dangling from above and plants in pots near the ceiling. The space was open, warm, and full of color, everything a great place for kids should be.

We checked in at the new front desk and I noticed the old note card filing system had given way to computers. The whole process was much faster and more organized and professional. Thankfully, despite the bigger space, the prices have remained the same. We were instructed to spray our hands with some naturally derived sanitizer before entering the play space and to place any toys that ended up in little mouths in a marked bucket to be cleaned. This was a welcome rule for me, a mom always worrying about when the family will catch its next fun virus. And with the swine flu scare, I'm sure parents are even more concerned than normal.

I hung our coats on one of the dog-tail hooks and placed our shoes in the new cubbies. My little one wiggled out of my arms to try out the toys, and I was relieved to see that one of the staples of the Treehouse had not been compromised — wooden, non-electronic, toys that foster imagination (and don't drive parents to search frantically for

an "off" switch). Our familiar favorites remained: the tot play structure complete with a tunnel and slide, the zoo of giant stuffed animals for hugs and rides, and the rocking boat ready for a rowing expedition. And I was as excited as she was to try out some new additions: a miniature Ferris wheel, food market, and large table set down at a child's level, covered with puzzles and books. I noticed an area with a curtain that can be pulled shut for birthday celebrations.

I was a little disappointed that outside food is no longer permitted, but pleased with the café selection. We chose yogurt, a pretzel, and coffee (a necessity for this mom), and the woman behind the counter asked if I would like to put it on our tab. I thought this was genius, because the kids are always deciding they want something else, so no matter how many trips I make to the counter, I only have to pay once, on the way out.

I glanced at the toys for sale, going over birthdays in my head, as we made our way to the pretty little café area with wooden tables and chairs with comfy red cushions. I

noted the multitude of electrical outlets lining the walls in case I was ever able to bring my computer along. I could see how this new set-up could definitely make it more tempting for adults to turn their backs on children, but the parents I encountered were attentive and involved with their kids.

Even the bathroom was nice — a large space with a changing table — but I noticed one missing necessity: a sink. But, thankfully, they didn't forget the sink. Across from regular sinks on the wall outside the bathroom, there is a hand-washing station that entertained my daughter even more than all the toys. This is not your ordinary sink, but a trough-like steel tub. Kids can step on a circle of metal on the floor and watch with wonder as water showers down from above. What a great way to encourage hand washing! I wish I had one at home.

It's hard to believe, but The Little Treehouse hasn't finished growing! There will soon be a kitchen serving brick-oven pizzas, salads, and kid-friendly choices. And there is a large basement yet to be finished, which will have a tumbling room and a more private space for parties.

### THE LITTLE TREEHOUSE (a play café)

10 West Gravers Lane  
Philadelphia, PA 19118  
215.247.3637

[www.TreehousePlayCafe.com](http://www.TreehousePlayCafe.com)

**Open 7 days a week:**

9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

**Price:** \$7.50 for children (\$6 off-peak), half-price for siblings, non-crawling babies free. \$55 for a 10-visit card (\$40 off-peak). Special price after 1 p.m.



The Great Alexei wows children and parents at the Little Treehouse. 1,000 children visited the Treehouse last weekend. (Photo by Erin Vertreace)