

# big city moms

## BCM mompreneurs of the month

September 2009

Alison Berna  
Allison Schlanger

Founders of  
apple seeds



### **BCM - How and Why did you start apple seeds?**

Allison & Alison We met in an elevator on our way to a mommy and me music class. Our twins were 5 months and 6 months old, and we became instant friends. We began to commiserate over the fact that we could barely fit our twin strollers in the elevator and that once we got to class the rooms felt small and not so kid-friendly. After the class ended, there was nowhere to just hang out. We rushed to a 45 minute class (inevitably showing up late) and before we knew it, it was over and we were rushing out again. We thought "wouldn't it be great if there was a place with classes AND a playground AND an eating area and more". We frequented Madison Square Park but on cold or rainy days there were not many options in our neighborhood. So together with our husbands we created apple seeds.

### **BCM -Both of you have a great dynamic of work together. How did you team up? Why do you think you work so well together?**

Allison & Alison - It was pretty organic. Our friendship formed quite quickly and we felt like we were meant to be friends. Both of us having twins certainly added to our common connection and we both had the same goals. We were leaving our jobs to stay at home with our babies, and this idea was a diversion...but in the direction of spending more time with our kids and our husbands. It was a life we both wanted. And we both lived in a community that we knew needed a place like apple seeds.

### **BCM -Most people do not know that apple seeds is also a family business. What is it like working with your husbands? How do you separate work and home?**

Allison & Alison - It's amazing how many people ask us about working with our husbands and assume it's difficult. I think we'd both agree that it's been nothing but a luxury to share our work lives as a family. In truth, it makes the work-life balance easier. At home, we don't have to talk about work since we've been together all day. That leaves a lot of time and space for other things. At work, we share the same visions and long term goals so we can get right to the point. We all work quickly and we all focus on the end goal, our children.

It also helps that the four of us do such different things at work. The guys take on the financials and the big picture. We work on the big picture as well but spend most of our time with our managers and employees as well as on various partnerships and marketing. There are days when we barely see each other since we work on such different projects. In the end, we always come together and make decisions as a foursome.

The work-life balance is so complicated for any working parent. But we've been lucky to have our kids with us at work nearly every day. And when we run out to pick up from school or take our kids to a play date or an appointment, our husbands are there for us, holding down the fort. Who would you trust more than that?

### **BCM - Tell us more about apple seeds. Are there any perks for Big City Moms?**

Allison & Alison - apple seeds is an all-in-one play space for families with children newborn to 5 years old. We have a 2500 square foot indoor playground with both a sports room and various permanent exhibits including an NYC taxi, a Lego table, a shape sorter, a magnet wall and a deli where kids can buy their fruits and vegetables. The playground is cleaned multiple times a day and is available to members every hour that we are open (M-F 9am-6pm, S/S 10am-4pm). apple seeds has 7 classrooms with about 100 classes in week in topics including art, cooking, science, construction, ballet, tap, baby gym and movement, soccer, seedlings gradual separation class and our highly popular music program songs for seeds. apple seeds also has a retail boutique with clothes, books and toys, great for impulse buys as well as gifts. We have a snack bar with an eating area, a kids' hair salon and fun, themed birthday parties every weekend.

apple seeds and Big City Moms co-host a weekly class called "chat & snack". Every Monday, new moms gather to meet with various experts about sleep (how to get more of it), infant safety, finding the right caregiver, and more. apple seeds and Big City Moms also co-host regular evening seminars on issues affecting parents of young children.

The BCM Mommy Pass is of course very welcome at apple seeds.

### **BCM - What advice do you have for other moms who are thinking about starting businesses?**

Allison & Alison - If it's a good idea and you have a support system, just do it. Why not try? If you know in your heart that as a mom you would be a consumer of your own idea, you can be sure that there are countless other moms just like you who are probably looking for what you have to offer.

Our main piece of advice is to find a trusted partner. Starting a business takes a lot of time and energy and sharing that with someone allows you to take needed time off with your children and family, as well as get the rest and breaks you need. It's a good idea find a balance with someone, in your workloads and in your lives. You will share a lot together – finding answers to difficult questions but most often sharing amazing experiences.

### **Now for the fun stuff - A little bit about you both**

#### **BCM - What has been your most memorable moment(s) as a mom?**

Alison Berna - : What a difficult question! There are so many moments – from the moment they were put into my arms in the hospital to the moment I hear them playing in the background as I write this. I have to say that Bobby and I probably most enjoy watching them play with one another, the way they negotiate and decide what to play. I love seeing the way they go into "character" and stay there for hours on end, in their own little magical world, their imaginations running deeper than I can keep up with. I love coming home from work with my husband and finding they turned our living room into a "theater" where they perform for us a ballet or tap dance (their version of the "Irish jig") or sing as loud as they possibly can.

A few months ago I was heading to Florida with some girlfriends for a girls' weekend away. The morning I left, I found them waiting at the door, their purses and backpacks packed (with pretend food and polly pockets) and they told me they were coming with me. "It's a girls' weekend mama and we are girls too!"