



**03/15/07**

## **Keeping parents and teenagers connected**

**By: Cara Latham, Staff Writer**

**Online newsletter aims to ease the sting of post-adolescent growing pains**

MILLSTONE — Around the time her oldest child was in elementary school, township resident Mary Friedman started realizing that most parenting magazines about potty training toddlers and getting children to sleep at night didn't really apply anymore.

Knowing firsthand how communication "drops off" between parents and their preteens and teens as they grow older, her experience in the publishing world led her and her husband to an idea — create a newsletter geared toward parenting teens.

"The issues were changing and the magazines weren't helping," said Ms. Friedman, who now has a 15-year-old son, a daughter who is about to turn 12 and a younger daughter. "We saw a hole in the market, and as we talked to people (about it), they agreed."

Ms. Friedman and her husband, Andrew, began a printed newsletter — Parenting Teens — about eight years ago. However, they soon realized that their business model did not work because of the costs of printing and mailing their newsletter to customers.

So, in December, Ms. Friedman said, they launched an online version of the newsletter, and so far, have nearly 2,000 subscribers.

The monthly newsletter is delivered to subscribers through e-mail, and is available in PDF format, so it can be downloaded to a person's home computer.

Judith Sachs, the newsletter's editorial director, whom Ms. Friedman knew through the publishing industry, said the newsletter covers cutting-edge topics — the first issue's cover story in December 2006 focused on binge drinking among teens — to keep parents informed on the latest trends in what their teens are doing.

Other topics include depression, cyber bullying and community Web sites like MySpace.com and Facebook.com. Even topics like, "Is your teen ready to baby-sit?" make it to the newsletter and "translated" into parenting terms, Ms. Sachs said.

But what makes the newsletter unique, according to Ms. Sachs, is that it also contains profiles of parents and teenagers within the story, so "it's kind of like you're talking to your neighbor and saying, 'What's the scoop?'"

"We wanted to give them (parents) everything they needed to know on a regular basis," she said. "There will be something in here that's relevant to what's going on in their lives right now."

Ms. Friedman said that many of the women who might read the newsletters are career woman and spend all day at work at a computer and may come home and also work on the computer. Within the newsletters and on the Web site, parents can find links for more information on the subjects they are reading, she added.

"If you're reading an article on depression and this is something that hits home with you, there are lots of links to other sites," Ms. Friedman said. "Every article has links to resources, books, Web sites and organizations for the person who wants to know more about a particular subject. It's not labor-intensive."

Various experts in different fields sit on advisory boards for the newsletter and writers are required to talk to at least three different experts when writing their articles, Ms. Sachs said. Many of the editorial board members also write for other magazines, such as Family Circle and Parenting, she added.

"In each issue, we have something that's about the family, relationships, money and finances," she said. There is even a short piece every month called, "Parenting on the Run," where an issue "that everybody deals with, like teens lying to you, or getting chores done," is highlighted, Ms. Sachs said. "These are kind of quick fix articles. You don't have to read a lot to get action-oriented solutions to problems."

Each issue also includes a review of either an album, movie or video game that teens might be seeing. It will give an outline of things like the lyrics, themes, how much violence is depicted, or facts like how women are treated, so parents can make up their own minds about each one, Ms. Sachs said. Then, the article will examine why the teens like it and what should parents be thinking about, she added.

Ms. Friedman said they are reaching out to school administrators, who in general, seem to be "very, very impressed" with the newsletter because they want the parents of their students to stay involved. An upcoming issue will feature a survival guide for proms, Ms. Sachs added. The group will be working with MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) when putting the article together.

The Colorado Parent Teacher Association will be partnering with Parenting Teens Online to recommend the newsletter to their individual chapters, Ms. Sachs said.

As the newsletter staff continues to look into issues affecting teens, they want to begin offering a quiz each month that relates to the cover story of the coming month, "so people get started on these topics on their own," said Ms. Sachs. And "they'll be able to see what other parents thought about."

While readership is up to about 2,000 subscribers, the newsletter gets about 100 new readers a week, and Ms. Friedman said they will continue to reach out to various groups to promote it.

"If they have teenagers, they need Parenting Teens Online," said Ms. Friedman.