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Local family creates online magazine for girls

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Taylor and Allie Ramirez found that magazines printed for girls did not feature what girls actually wanted to see.

And they would know, as these Mechanicsville-area young ladies are 12 and 10 years old, respectively.

The magazines the Ramirez sisters encountered pictured professional models, but never the average girl next door. They'd obsess over celebrities, but not everyday young women. Or they'd be full of articles just a little too mature for preteens.

Taylor found herself thinking, "I wish that there was a magazine out there that had girls just like me."

Since the sisters had no luck finding such a magazine, they decided they should create their own. At once, they commenced with bugging their father.

Tony Ramirez understood that he didn't know the first thing about publishing a magazine, so he had to say no.

The girls changed tactics: What if it was an online magazine?

Tony was no expert in Web site construction either, but the girls were persistent.

"We were just really excited about it, and we were really talking about it, and we really wanted to do it, so we just thought about it for a week, and we were still excited about it by the end of the week," Taylor recalled.

Tony set out to learn all he could about building a Web site. Taylor already knew what she wanted on the site.

They began this process near the beginning of March, this year, with Tony providing the technical knowledge and Taylor picking out the color schemes and format.

The Web site became a project for the whole family, with Allie lending her expertise as well, and mother Tracy also pitching in. Over time, Taylor learned more and more about how to maintain and operate the site.

On May 2, www.GirlzLikeMe.com launched.

The site is aimed at girls ages 7-14, and it features such pages as "Girl of the Week," "Pets," "Ask Allie," "Just for Fun," "A Servant's Heart," "Fashion," and more.

On the homepage reads the motto, "Where girls are special." Below that, it proclaims, "Fi-

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Parents Tracy and Tony Ramirez, with daughters Allie, left, and Taylor. (H-P photo by Dan Sherrier)

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nally, a magazine with your picture inside!”

At the beginning, the family promoted the magazine through word-of-mouth and took a “let’s see what happens” approach, Tony said.

What happened was that girls from throughout the United States – and even other countries – were visiting the site. And they kept returning.

By the time the site reached just over a month old, it was averaging nearly 100 visits per day, or about 60-70 unique views, with 900 pages once viewed in a single day. With the archives, the site has grown to over 100 different pages.

“We were amazed at how many people were coming to it,” Tony commented.

One aspect of the site that appeals to its young viewers is the ability to submit their own photos to the magazine.

“That’s what the beauty of all this is. Every page, they’re allowed to submit something into it and be

part of it. It’s not just looking at,” said Tracy, who lends her motherly wisdom to the “Ask Allie” advice column.

“One of our main goals was to just have pictures of girls on every single page,” Taylor stated.

“Girls don’t have to be perfect to be featured on there. They can just be whoever they are,” Tracy added.

While the kids appreciate the content, the parents appreciate that it’s a safe, clean site.

There are no message boards, no chat forums, no registration, and no way to contact any girl whose picture appears on the site. Girls are only identified by first name, age, and the state or country they live in. No other information is requested.

“It truly is a magazine,” Tony explained, “It’s simply no different than you picking up a magazine at the store and looking at it.”

He continued, “One thing we get from parents is, they’re writing back and they’re saying thank you for this site.

“One parent, I love her story – she said, ‘Could you hear the

screams from our house?’ Because [her daughter] was featured as Girl of the Week. And she said it’s just like being picked as Miss America. So they’re getting excited.”

There’s another feature sure to please parents—the site contains no advertising.

Tony said, “We know we could do advertising right now, but we would have no control over who advertises. And so that’s why we choose not to. So we’ll just keep it a good, clean site.”

GirlzLikeMe.com T-shirts are sold through the site, but Tony does not expect to generate strong profits from the clothing sales.

“It’s really just an application of business,” he said, pointing out that the overall project has been a good learning experience for his two home-schooled daughters.

“Right now, it’s just for fun,” he continued.

Tracy added that it’s “fun and a lot of work” as well as “good family time.”

“We have morning meetings, the whole family, and we sit down and we discuss [the site],” Tony said.

The Web site has caught the attention of industry professionals, who have been eager to take young Taylor under their wing and lend some guidance.

“People have been so helpful,” Tony said. “It’s their [the professionals’] passion, and they see a 12-year-old, and they’re going, ‘Oh, man, I wish we were doing that when we were 12.’”

Even the older brothers of regular viewers, from a purely technical standpoint, have taken an interest in the endeavor.

“I’ve had a lot of people say, ‘How in the world did you build a Web site?’” Taylor said.

The future of the Web site could grow into any number of directions. One possibility is that Taylor might move on to create a site for teenagers while Allie takes over running GirlzLikeMe.

For now, Taylor seems certain of at least one thing: “We’re going to try to continue this as long as we possibly can.”

To view the online magazine, go to www.GirlzLikeMe.com.