

One Smart Cookie

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As the mom of a techno-savvy 3_-year-old, Keli McCreadie DiRisio was disappointed in educational software available for children.

“My son loves to be on the computer,” says DiRisio ’92 (graphic design) and ’93 (M.S. graphic arts printing and publishing), “but everything out there is so commercial. I was so frustrated.”

Her friend Leslie Summerson agreed. One day while their children played, the two women decided to do something to fill the void. They launched One Smart Cookie Productions in November 2004 and released the first of a series of multi-level, interactive educational DVDs last October. “Let’s Explore . . . Autumn and Winter” is getting outstanding reviews from parents and educators, and the young company has received several awards. The second and third installments in the series, “Let’s Explore . . . Spring and Summer,” and “Let’s Explore . . . Animals” are in the works.

The two friends have an ideal combination of skills for such a project. DiRisio, who lives in Victor, N.Y., has operated her own graphic design firm, Alterna Design + Company, since 1997. Summerson, who also lives in Victor, teaches fourth grade.

DiRisio had additional incentive for developing such a product. “I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis shortly after I received my master’s degree,” she says. “Fatigue is a big part of MS, and on some days I am too tired to go outside and play with my son. An educational activity we can enjoy together indoors is a welcome alternative.”

The “Let’s Explore” DVDs are divided into three levels with a wide range of facts and visuals; the DVD grows with the child, as they move through the levels. It is not something that will be tossed aside to gather dust after the child has used it once or twice. Using video, photos, animation and original music, they are designed to help children from kindergarten through elementary school develop problem solving, mathematical analysis, mapping, scientific inquiry and language skills.

Shortly after the first DVD was released, the company was selected as one of 15 semi-finalists in the National MS Society’s “MS Leaders of Hope” competition. In December, it was named winner of the Small Business Development Program’s 2005 Success Story for Rochester/Brockport.

The DVD has been picked up by Ward Scientific, one of the nation’s largest educational science product catalogs, for inclusion in their Science Kit and Boreal Laboratories 2006 catalog. “Let’s Explore” can also be purchased through the company’s Web site, www.onesmartcookieproductions.com, as well as at some Rochester-area stores.

“The feedback has been terrific,” says DiRisio. “We worked very hard on this, and it’s really gratifying to see the positive response.”