



MAGGIE SHARPE

John Handel, Karen Jimenez, 3, Isabella Handel, 3, Gloria Handel and Margarita Placido enjoy time together at the 10th anniversary of Kids into Speaking Spanish.

Kids Learn Love of Spanish Language

by MAGGIE SHARPE
Staff Writer

Gloria Handel says she feels "blessed" that her 3-year-old daughter Isabella has the opportunity to go to Kids into Speaking Spanish (KISS), a Spanish immersion preschool and kindergarten in Walnut Creek.

"It feels like you're going from your house to another home," says Handel, who lives in Walnut Creek. "It's nurturing, loving and supportive. Isabella thrives on going here."

KISS celebrated its 10th anniversary with a gala bash on August 15 at the school, with barbecue, face painting, bouncy houses, games and lots of community spirit. Throngs of excited children and parents packed the festivities.

KISS was launched in 2000 by Miramonte High School graduate and Orinda resident Chris Clark. He has since opened another school in Montclair in Oakland, with plans for a third site in Castro Valley soon. KISS started as an after-school

program, but "morphed" into preschool, says Clark.

"When I started 10 years ago, no one really knew about immersion language programs," says Clark, who wanted his own three kids to learn a second language. "It was a gamble. But people seemed to love the idea."

He says nearly all the learning is done in Spanish. "All our teachers are from Central or South America," says Clark. "We have teachers from Peru, Argentina, Guatemala and Columbia."

The teachers use not only Spanish language, but song, dance, and arts and crafts to teach the children.

Gloria Handel says the cultural aspect of the program is incredible. "Isabella brought home a CD of songs that they made at school, and she knows all the words," says Handel. "My whole kitchen is covered with incredible crafts that Isabella has made at school."

For more information about KISS, contact director Maribel Guerra at 925-952-9903 or visit www.kissprogram.com.