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Kid-Centric Condos

By Teri Karush Rogers

The way to a home buyer's heart, it seems, is through amenities for the kids. At least that's the thought of a number of urban condo developers embroiled in an increasingly pitched battle for real estate dollars. In New York City, the 28-story Cielo will hire an "art concierge" to broker special showings at museums for families who live on Manhattan's museum-dotted Upper East Side, while the residents of the Court Street Lofts in Brooklyn will be able to phone, fax or e-mail a "nanny concierge" to arrange play dates, scuba lessons, baby sitters or anything else a put-upon parent might want -- including a referral to a child psychologist. Meanwhile, the developers of a 173-unit glass-clad luxury condo at 10 West End Avenue in Manhattan are collaborating with the Children's Museum of Manhattan to create a designer playroom that includes a baby "crawling challenge course" and a mock city bus complete with faux advertising "to motivate storytelling" (with questions like "How far from the Hudson River are we?" or "Is this bus going north?"). The developers of all of these residences say that the basement playroom just isn't enough for choosy parents anymore. Joseph Korff, the president of Arc Development in Manhattan, recalls how his young grandson was frightened by the dank, subterranean playroom at his Park Avenue residence. So at his company's 20-story Solaria condominium in Riverdale, an affluent section of the Bronx, professional offices on the first floor were nixed in favor of a glassed-in playroom, while a "celestial observatory" on a roof deck, complete with telescope, will feature science programs run in collaboration with the Amateur Astronomers Association. The trend is not limited to New York. In Chicago, a 5,000-unit condo and rental development called **Lakeshore East** will include a private elementary school. Ginna Ryan, the C.F.O. of Mauge Inc., a Chicago real estate and hospitality branding firm that is representing **Lakeshore East**, says of the buyers there, "Not all of these people are nouveau riche, but they're very conspicuous consumers, and they like the idea of paying for anything they could possibly want." To explain the rash of kid-centric features, Ryan cited two modern parenting plagues: packed two-career schedules that elevate convenience into a necessity, and parental guilt over their progeny's comparative lack of freedom to roam unscheduled and sometimes unsupervised. Of course, the catering-to-kids trend could be as ephemeral as a buyer's market. As Henry S. Hacker, the managing director of Hacker Dolan & Partners, a Manhattan marketing firm with New York real estate developers, says, "A lot of this stuff, if it doesn't work, they'll pull it out and put in a wine cellar." Teri Karush Rogers