



The Emmitsburg Dispatch

Computer Mommy

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Wendy Shepherd is a young woman in her thirties, married, mother of three children. She considers her full-time occupation to be homemaker and home schooler. Wendy is also a "Computer Mommy." From her home in Emmitsburg she has her own little business, successfully running several web sites. One of her latest sites, actually called Computer Mommy at

www.computermommy.com, went online this past December 2000 because Wendy said, "I want to share information with other moms about how they can use the Internet. I created the site as a resource: it includes information on how to make a web page, how moms can make money at home, articles and interviews, and a place for moms to sell products."

In 1995 Wendy and her husband Michael moved to Emmitsburg, where Michael's parents live. In addition to choosing to live close to family, they decided that Wendy would be a stay-at-home mom. In a large percentage of families both parents work in order to provide the needs and wants of the family, but the

Shepherds demonstrate how a family can have a full-time mother and still make a little extra money on the side too. Like most average Americans, Wendy and Michael look forward to owning their own home and they are currently saving for this dream.

Wendy became interested in the computer when she and her husband were introduced to it by her father-in-law. They viewed the computer as useful in that they could use it to do their budget, play games, play music, and learn something new. It wasn't a necessity but they considered it more an entertainment saying, "It seemed more interesting than watching television." When they purchased their first computer they had two little ones. Like most mothers with children Wendy's day is pretty full so this became her entertainment during the children's naptime or at night when they were in bed. She found the computer fascinating and started playing with the previously installed programs. Eventually the Shepherds decided to get on the Internet and Wendy said, "I felt overwhelmed at first as there was suddenly a flood of information right at my fingertips! I began to read about different people and their families, I found other moms to talk to, and it seemed I learned everything under the sun."

After a while Wendy noticed that regular people, not just big businesses, were making web sites. At that time her Internet provider was America Online (AOL) and she realized that there was a way to make a web page on AOL for free. Both Wendy and Michael took on the venture of making a web page together, filling each other in on what they learned. When they saw something on someone else's web site that they liked they wanted to see how it was done so they could adopt similar ideas for their own site. They realized the code wasn't hard to learn, Wendy said: "Easier than another country's foreign language." She said one trick is to use the view command at the top of the Internet browser to do a view source to see the code and commented it's a good foundational tool for learning.

Wendy launched into the Internet in February 1999 with her first major site "TipzTime". TipzTime (derived from Tips Time) at www.tipztime.com was

created because the household and garden tips she was posting on her personal web page became very popular. She created the site to be a useful resource comprised of just these good tips and reading material. Eventually she added craft ideas and chore charts as well. Wendy, continuing to learn, realized she could incorporate money-making features in her site through an affiliate marketer such as "LinkShare," in which she could be paid by merchants when someone would "click through" her site to theirs. If someone would buy something she would be paid a percentage of sale, or "pay per lead" if someone signs up for something, like a catalog. Web sites have to go through an approval process in order for reputable companies to advertise there. Because of the quality of her sites she is an approved advertiser for L.L. Bean. Wendy also feels the company L.L. Bean is one of quality and worth promoting so it fosters a working environment. TipzTime has become a success story for Wendy, getting on average about 25,000 visitors weekly. If you compare her web site's visitors to the foot traffic of the local grocery store the Jubilee, which is visited most in Emmitsburg, her site gets double or triple the visitors.

TipzTime has become an image link on the front page of the community site Emmitsburg.net. According to Mike Hillman, the creator of the site which celebrates its one-year anniversary this April: "Emmitsburg.net and TipzTime operate in a collaborative manner. Unlike other sites that can be linked to from Emmitsburg.net, TipzTime is the only for-profit web site that has its image on the site, and it's the only for-profit site that, when clicked on, opens in the same window." As in all collaborative efforts, both sides benefit. Wendy provides content material for Emmitsburg.net by way of this link to her site, and TipzTime utilizes articles from Emmitsburg.net, providing exposure for the authors to her site visitors. Because of these articles it provides exposure to Emmitsburg and draws people over to Emmitsburg.net from her site providing "traffic." Hillman said, "On average, Wendy sends Emmitsburg.net 200 of its 1000 visitors daily."

Of their collaboration, Wendy recalls, "I wanted to support the people who write articles in Emmitsburg and bring traffic to the Emmitsburg site. I live in

Emmitsburg, and I love this quaint town. I wanted to contribute some recognition to the people of the community."

Wendy, wanting to share her success by launching her site Computer Mommy said, "Anyone can do what I'm doing. You don't have to go to school for it." Wendy has two years of community college, none of which consisted of any computer training. In an encouraging tone Wendy said, "There are a mass amount of free reliable resources online that you can learn from. Also, there are many moms and dads that work out of their homes on their computers. We all network to promote and learn from each other." Wendy also provides services for those who don't want to develop a web site themselves but just want to run one. She creates web sites doing everything from writing the hypertext markup language (html code) to making buttons, banners, logos, and illustrations. She also does marketing and advertising as well as running newsletters. Wendy says she prefers, however, to do her favorite thing—creating graphics. According to Hillman, "All the graphics on Emmitsburg.net are the handiwork of Wendy." Wendy's accomplishments haven't been without trial. Like most individuals who spend any amount of time on a computer Wendy has experienced setbacks with computer down time. Recently she was in the process of creating a web site called "Computer Children" when she experienced a computer crash and lost her entire design. Losing ambition to continue she diverted her attention to a site she just launched February 2001 called "Chart Jungle." Chart Jungle at www.chartjungle.com is a site she created for home schoolers, teachers, and parents and contains charts. It will eventually incorporate articles, web sites, and information of related material. She intends to reconstruct her site Computer Children which will feature information about children's software and related children's sites on the Internet. The site will look similar to Computer Mommy and she hopes to have it available this summer.

Wendy continues her routine now with three boys: Erick age 7, Timothy age 5, and Mark 21 months. She has chosen to home school because she wants to spend as much time as possible with her children while they are growing up. She wants to

provide them with some Biblical teaching and use a school curriculum that she feels works for each child. She says she wants to know exactly what each child is learning and with one-on-one teaching the children progress past grade level. Each child learns at his own pace and she wants to have the flexibility to change to something that may work better for him.. The other advantage of the computer to the home schooler is access to the vast amount of resources on the Internet including free lesson plans. At this time, Wendy home schools two of her three boys, working on her computer during quiet/nap time and after they go to bed. Since she has access to the computer all the time she can check her electronic mail (e-mail) throughout the day for anything that may be important to her web sites. The money she's made has paid for her computer and helped to purchase her school curriculum and extra school supplies for home schooling. She says, "The plus side is that I can make my own hours at what I do. The Internet runs twenty-four hours a day and if the boys are sick I can tend to them and not worry about having to work. There have been times that I haven't updated the web site for two weeks because of family circumstances. Family is the most important thing, so family comes first."