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First impressions by castmaker popular gifts

Sept 14, 2006 12:00 AM

Michelle Astanoff, a Maricopa mother of one, is a regular at Gilbert hospitals. But she's not a doctor or nurse.

She's the Southeast Valley and south Scottsdale representative for Wee Piggies, an international company that sells impressions of children's hands and feet.

Astanoff goes to the hospital or to people's homes and takes impressions.

advertisement

"I've done impressions as early as an hour after birth, and I love that, because babies change so fast," Astanoff said. "I've also done impressions of older children and entire families."

To make the impression, the baby's hands or feet are dipped in a custom-made, non-toxic, lukewarm molding material for 30 seconds. The liquid turns into a soft, rubbery mold from which the child can easily slip his or her hand or foot.

After the casts are complete, she consults with the client on framing or display of the precious

keepsake.

Merritt Franklin, mom of Carter in Tempe, was extremely pleased with her experience.

"It was so great to have Michelle come to our home, because Carter was only three weeks and we weren't comfortable taking him out," Franklin said. "The finished product is beautiful. I'll do this for all my children."

Astanoff has always been interested in art, taking every opportunity through school to improve her skills and explore her talent.

"I think my parents just thought I wanted to take the easy way out, but I really loved art and expressing myself through multimedia," she said.

She got hooked on working with wax, but quickly realized wax and the Arizona sun don't make great art, so she became interested when she heard about Wee Piggies.

"This career gives me the opportunity to be a stay-at-home mom with my one-year-old, to express myself through art, and to interact with a community of people who care about their children. It is the ideal job for me," Astanoff said.

Wee Piggies also makes impressions of children's and adults' belly buttons and lips and paw prints of a favorite animal.

Items start at \$30.

One of Astanoff's favorite pieces she has cast was the feet of triplets.

"It was amazing to see those three pair of itty, bitty feet - so similar and yet so different," she said.

She has also made something special for her own family.

"I created life casts of the four generations of women in my family," she said. "To me, having the hands of my grandmother, mother, me and my daughter all preserved together is better than a family tree."

Information: www.weepiggies.com.

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