

A Brief History of the International Association for Child Safety

by Nancy Reynolds

***Editor's Note:** Included below are the names of some members who have played a pivotal role in the history of IAFCS, but there are many other members unnamed who also have been instrumental in the Association's success.*

IN THE BEGINNING

The evolution of the International Association for Child Safety began in the mid 1980s. At that time, professional babyproofing was a new entrepreneurial idea. The first companies were all individual businesses working independently of one another, experiencing the typical difficulties of starting a small, unique-concept business.

One of these companies was Dallas, Texas-based Dr. Babyproofer, owned and operated by Thom Golden. Thom would receive calls from people looking for information about products and advice about starting a babyproofing business. Since Dallas was the permanent location of the Juvenile Products and Manufacturers Association's (JPMA) annual product show, Thom lived in a convenient place to learn about the latest items coming onto the market. Dallas was also the home of Kindergard, the first company in North America to specialize in babyproofing products. Kindergard did not continue in business after the early '90s.

Thom would suggest that new babyproofers come out to Dallas during JPMA's show in October to see the products and at the same time meet with him. In 1986, Nancy Reynolds of BabySecure in Montreal, Canada, made her first trip to the show. For the next several years, Thom and Nancy walked the JPMA show halls, meeting with the product vendors and exchanging ideas. Occasionally they would run into new babyproofers. Each year, as more came, informal meetings were arranged in lounge areas of the show or over dinner in the evenings.

In the early 1990s, a babyproofing business in Los Angeles, California, Babyproofers International (B.I.), began offering franchises as well as training and product distribution. One of the franchisees, Steve Weinstein of Royal Baby Safety Corporation in New Jersey, would organize annual exchange meetings for B.I. affiliates located in the northeastern United States. When B.I. folded, the franchisees started to source out suppliers of products for themselves and began to attend the JPMA show. Steve continued to coordinate a spring meeting and it evolved into a meeting of northeast babyproofers. It met for 15 years, starting with about 10 members attending and eventually growing to about 25. Later on, West Coast meetings were also organized by Rachel Murray, a former childproofer and board member.

With more attending JPMA each year, babyproofers started thinking that it might be useful to set up an organized meeting place to have a coordinated opportunity for exchanging ideas. They also wondered if, by banding together, they could obtain discounts from vendors, have more input with manufacturers, qualify for group insurance plans, develop industry standards, and create opportunities for professional recognition and publicity.

FIRST MEETING

The first meeting was held in Dallas on November 4, 1995, the day before the opening of the JPMA show. About 15 companies were represented. The name International Association for Child Safety was adopted, with the word "international" added to reflect two members from Canada in attendance. This proved insightful as it allowed for the Association to later include members from other countries such as Turkey, England, New Zealand, South Africa, Columbia and the Netherlands.

At the first meeting there were a few product presentations from vendors and discussions on setting up industry standards, raising consumer awareness about professional babyproofers, product quality and getting insurance. It was agreed that funds would need to be collected in order to cover some general expenses and the publication of a newsletter.

EVOLVING ORGANIZATION

The first IAFCS newsletter, edited by Steve Weinstein and sent out in the fall of 1996, offered news about CPSC investigations as well as tips on tools, installation and how to give presentations to community groups. In the spring of 1997, with some help from Allen Stern of Child Safety Plus in New Jersey, a toll-free telephone referral number (1-888-677-IACS) was set up. A second newsletter was sent out in the fall. Annual meetings continued and ran 3-4 hours in the late afternoon after attendees had been to the JPMA show.

IAFCS, A NON PROFIT ORGANIZATION

After many hours of volunteer time consulting with lawyers, aided by Steve Weinstein and Jeff Baril of Massachusetts-based Safe Beginnings, Barbara Kelczewski made a presentation to those attending the 1997 meeting that the Association was at a crossroads. A decision needed to be made as to whether it should continue as an informal group or a legally recognized non-profit organization. Without non-profit status, IAFCS could not get a bank account under its name. Furthermore, without the protection of a legal entity, there were legal and liability concerns for officers and members. Non-profit status would have the added advantage of providing a framework for the organization of elected leaders of the Association and their responsibilities. Members voted and the wheels were set in motion. On October 15, 1997, the International Association for Child Safety was incorporated.

Another milestone came in the spring of 1998 when Carolyn Gilbert of Scarbrough, Medlin & Associates in Dallas was able to find a reasonably priced liability insurance policy for IAFCS members. The policy included coverage for both general liability and professional liability and included completed operations which many individual members had found impossible to find at any price. The IAFCS group insurance has become a significant asset to IAFCS members and a key factor in membership growth.

Annual meetings continued in Dallas in conjunction with the JPMA product show until 2003 when a decision was made to align the annual meeting with the newly formed All Baby and Child (ABC) product show in Las Vegas. Meetings also expanded into a full educational conference during this time with speakers and workshops for two days.

COMPANY SPONSORSHIP

In the spring of 1999, after preliminary discussions with other companies, Safety First approached Barbara Kelczewski about becoming our corporate sponsor. Barbara was a very cautious and a hard bargainer, going back and forth, and seeking legal advice over the careful wording of the agreement. Finally on September 1, IAFCS joined forces with Safety First “to promote child safety awareness and educate parents on ways to help reduce preventable household injuries.”

The one year sponsorship included a donation of funds to help support IAFCS' efforts to grow the Association. In addition, Safety First arranged for the creation of our logo, member discounts, improvements to our web site and a referral system for consumers to find members on their web site.

MOVING FORWARD

In February, 2008 the Officers and Board of Directors held a facilitated strategic planning meeting to lay out future goals for the IAFCS. Among the highlights of goals were as follows:

- 1) Hire an executive director. After over 10 years of operating solely by volunteer members, it was decided that the association could not continue to grow without this position added. In November 2008, Colleen Driscoll, a long-time IAFCS volunteer and babyproofer, accepted this position.
- 2) Streamline the leadership into three officer/board members to more efficiently work with the executive director, committees and task forces. This was approved and implemented during the 2009 elections.
- 3) Move the annual meetings away from the juvenile industry product show. This would allow the meetings to be in varied locations and to encourage vendors to bring their safety products to the IAFCS. The 2008 meeting was held in October in Chicago, 2009 in New Orleans, and 2010 will be in Phoenix. Nancy Reynolds, as chair of the Product Information and Exchange committee, has been successful in getting samples of many new safety products from vendors.
- 4) Create new categories of membership including foundation, associate, and manufacturing members. All three categories have been developed with new members in each category.
- 5) Create a task force to develop and implement the childproofing industries first Certification program. The Certified Professional Childproofer (CPC) program is being rolled out and the first examination will be held in conjunction with the 2010 annual meeting.